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# A Basic Qualitative Study Investigating the Implementation of Constructivist Teaching Practices in a K-2 Art Classroom

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Buffalo State  
State University of New York  
Department of Education

A Master's Project in Art Education

A Basic Qualitative Study Investigating the Implementation of  
Constructivist Teaching Practices in a K-2 Art Classroom

By  
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of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

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Approved by:

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Dr. Shirley Hayes  
Project Advisor

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## **Abstract**

This basic qualitative research examined the question, “What aspects of constructivism can be found in a kindergarten through second grade art classroom?” Over an eight to ten week period, I investigated a kindergarten, first, and second grade class of an elementary art teacher who did not identify herself as a constructivist teacher, but claimed to incorporate as many constructivist aspects as possible. I interpreted the data collected through a constructivist lens in order to record the implementation of aspects of constructivist practices and explore the variety of verbal and visual responses of the teacher and students. Data collection methods included interviews, observations, and document analysis. As data analysis occurred the following three categories emerged: 1) challenges in implementing aspects of constructivism; 2) student empowerment: teacher expectations and student responses; and 3) teacher limitations and student responses. This art teacher encountered issues of time constraints, school budget, and state standards that had an affect on the amount of constructivist practices she could incorporate into the classroom.

One overriding conclusion to this study was how that this art teacher understood little of the theory of constructivism yet practiced some of the tenets. This art teacher needed to achieve a sense of balance between structure and artistic freedom, in order for K-2 students to become empowered in the art classroom and to have a meaningful experience while creating their artwork. Artistic freedom relates to constructivism as Brooks and Brooks (1996) called for, the active construction of meaning through the teacher placing in the students’ hands, “the exhilarating power to follow trails of interest, to make connections, to reformulate ideas, and to reach unique conclusions” (p. 22).



Lastly, I found that the underlying challenge facing this art teacher in effectively implementing aspects of constructivism into their K-2 classes was, the lack of modeling and resources available. Additionally, more research needs to be done in order to make improvements in implementing constructivism in art education classrooms.

## Chapter I: Introduction

### Background Narrative

At times, art educators feel the need to focus on incorporating the elements and principles of design in their teaching. The elements and principles of design are formal properties (formalist theory) that form a language for talking, writing about, and creating works of art. The elements and principles of design incorporated in New York State's visual arts standards are: color, line, texture, shape, value, form, proportion, contrast, emphasis, rhythm, space, balance, variety, and pattern. Occasionally teachers seem to be resistant or unable to implement more creative options in the classroom, which contemporary research in the field indicates would lead to more meaningful art making and ensure students cognitive growth in art. The problem seems to arise when a curriculum becomes entirely built upon that one particular facet of the state and national standards and thus ignores the perceptions, experiences, and imaginative artistic processes of each individual student. Parks (2012), Art Education Professor at the SUNY College at Buffalo, stated in the *NYSATA News*, "Of the 28 performance indicators listed with the New York State Standards, only **ONE** addresses the e's and p's of design. And yet, we continue to place primary emphasis on them in our curricula and teaching! What about the other 27?" (p. 28). Parks, like several art educators, believes that art has to be taught with less emphasis on the formal properties and more emphasis on art as a form of inquiry.

In my K-12 educational experience, teachers supported students' innovative ideas and provided us with flexible opportunities to demonstrate our interpretation of the content. I was encouraged to bring my own personal experiences and beliefs into my

artwork, which helped me to take ownership of it. However, during my student teaching experiences I observed that, in some classrooms, students did not receive those opportunities to develop their own ideas and utilize imagination. I saw drastic differences from my own art education in the overall artistic procedures and products practiced by teachers in those schools. At the beginning of my student teaching experience, the final products produced by the students looked incredibly similar, so much so that it was difficult to distinguish one student's artwork from another. These experiences made me start to think about how and why students do not feel a sense of ownership in their artwork, and why students think that their artwork needs to look a specific way to be considered "good."

Throughout my first placement in student teaching, I observed and was pressured into teaching a formalist art curriculum developed for Pre-K-2 grade that was centered on the elements and principles of design. At the kindergarten level, students made owls using the color brown, used pre-cut shapes, and followed step-by-step instructions of where to glue their shapes. My first and second grade students learned about the difference between cool and warm colors. To teach them this concept, students used paintbrushes to apply glue to warm and cool colored tissue paper on two separate transparency sheets. Since it was autumn, students were then asked to trace and cut out a raindrop from their cool colors and a leaf out of their warm colors. The teacher discouraged students from drawing on their leaves and raindrops after they had written their name on them, which offered no opportunity for student ideas.

As an art teacher, I felt shame as my students generated "cookie-cutter" art. The last thing I wanted to do was limit or control the artistic processes and development of

students. Through this experience, I discovered how unmotivating and discouraging this type of curriculum can be. The teacher prevented students from having voice in the classroom, which resulted in students not being engaged, not developing their individual skill sets, and not making a personal connection to what they were creating and learning. This situation fueled my desire to make my second placement a more constructive experience for the students and myself.

In a second student teaching placement I taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade art, and incorporated a few new approaches that permitted students to have more freedom of choice of content and ideas within a lesson. Gradually, I began to move away from the approaches I had experienced in the lower elementary placement and aimed to help students make content personally relevant. I also let students have more of a choice in the materials that they could use in order to express their personal reaction to the concept. I was extremely cautious because it was difficult for me to find a common ground between too much control over my students' studio productions and too little. I did not want to hinder my students' imagination and expansion of ideas. Additionally, in relation to my classroom management I did not want them to feel as if they had complete reign over the classroom, which could undermine the structure of the classroom. I was trying to achieve balance in ownership of my classroom by developing a partnership with my students. As I found out later, this balance I was attempting to enact is fundamental to the constructivist approach to learning in an art classroom. The problems that I encountered in these student teaching placements form the basis for the research problem that I wanted to pursue.

## **Problem Statement**

At conference programs of well-known educational organizations, constructivism has been a topic of much discussion (Brooks and Brooks, 1996, p. viii). Brooks and Brooks noted that pushing student learning through standardized assessment results in students not making a deep connection to what they are learning (p. viii). This could result in students not being able to recall and apply what they have learned, in the present and later on in life. Brooks and Brooks believed that constructivism was becoming increasingly popular in education because of how it encouraged students to be thinkers and problem solvers (p. x). However, I found too few articles on how elementary art teachers employ constructivist practices successfully. By examining a kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (K-2) art classroom, I wanted to discover to what extent constructivist practices are used and how they worked.

## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate what a K-2 grade art classroom looks like when aspects of constructivism are implemented. Educational theorists Brooks and Brooks (1996) contrasted traditional and constructivist general education classrooms in order to expose the significance of constructivist practices to a student's development and growth. Brooks and Brooks explained,

In a constructivist classroom, the teacher searches for students' understandings of concepts, and then structures opportunities for students to refine or revise these understandings by posing contradictions, presenting new information, asking questions, encouraging research, and engaging students in inquiries designed to challenge current concepts (p. ix).

Arthur Efland, Professor Emeritus in Art Education at Ohio State University discussed art in schools as being a reflection of the school and not a reflection of the students' imagination (1976, p. 37). He believed that school administration heavily dictated the way art is presented in schools; this has an effect on the type of art that is created by students. According to Efland,

School art is not the same thing as child art. Child art is a spontaneous, unsupervised form of graphic expression usually done outside of school by children for their own satisfaction or in response to a need felt in an environment other than the school (p. 37).

Efland explained that child art should be what students are making in schools; students should feel a sense of empowerment and freedom in their art education experience.

Still in many art classrooms today, students are expected to understand and create artwork based on elements and principles in design. Olivia Gude, Associate Professor and Coordinator of Art Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, argued against this formalist approach to an art curriculum because she found it did not connect to students everyday lives. Gude (2004) created a Spiral Workshop curriculum for middle and high school age students that successfully applied and explored new principles for teaching in art education. Gude proposed that through these eight postmodern artmaking practices, students could find personal relevance and produce meaningful artwork while attacking important cultural subjects. One of the practices described the strategy of having students locate their artistic voice within their personal background. "By structuring art projects to introduce students to relevant contemporary art and thus to postmodern principles—strategies for understanding and making art today—students will gain the skills to

participate and shape contemporary cultural conversations” (p. 13). Brooks and Brooks (1996), Efland (1876), and Gude (2004) believed that constructivist practices enhanced student development and aided students in feeling a sense of ownership over their artwork. Ultimately, these educational theorists enforced the idea that art teachers should implement aspects of constructivism in art classrooms to benefit student learning.

### **Research Questions**

The central question for this study examines aspects of constructivism that can be found in a K-2 art classroom. Sub questions considered for this study are:

- What methods are employed to foster a constructivist K-2 art classroom?
- How do students respond to the implementation of constructivist aspects in a K-2 art classroom?
- What challenges arise in implementing aspects of constructivism in a K-2 art classroom?
- What can I and other teachers learn about teaching art using a constructivist approach by studying a K-2 art classroom?

### **Significance of Study**

This study explores what facets of constructivism can be utilized in K-2 art classrooms. Even though educational theorists have frequently employed these practices, much of the literature that I have reviewed to date has not covered specific ways of how art teachers incorporate constructivism into K-2 art classrooms. Art teachers and general education teachers can gain knowledge from this research and it will expose aspects of constructivism that are effective or perhaps not so effective in the art classroom. Definitions of terms frequently used in this study are provided in the next section.

## **Definitions of Terms**

Constructivism, as previously described by Brooks and Brooks (1996), is about students learning new concepts by bringing in their prior knowledge and building upon it through problem solving, exploration, research, experimentation, and socialization (p. ix). The review of literature explores the concept and aspects of constructivism in more detail. The following definitions are to help the reader comprehend the terms in the context of my study.

- **Applied Learning:** This happens when students apply what knowledge they have obtained while they are learning new skills and information (Diffily & Sassman, 2002, p. 12).
- **Performance Assessment:** This term is also referred to as authentic assessment. It is a form of assessment that evaluates students as they engage in real-world classroom situations (Edmiaston, 2002, p. 60). These real-world classroom situations or activities ask students to display what they have learned and internalized through application (Brooks & Brooks, 1996, p. 97). A few examples of performance assessments are: artwork, portfolios, oral reports, and journals.
- **Project-Based Learning (PBL):** Emphasizes learning activities also known as applied learning projects that are child-centered and take place over several days or weeks. In applied learning projects, students work in groups to investigate a topic of particular interest. Each group decides what resources they are going to use, how they are going to organize the information they gather, and how they are to present what they have



learned to the rest of their class (Diffily & Sassman, 2002, p. 13). When presented, applied learning projects vary in imagery, language, and content based on the specific interests examined by individual groups.

- Visual Culture: This term refers to the ideas and beliefs surrounding the objects and imagery humans encounter on an everyday basis (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 120).

### **Limitations of Study**

Limitations for this study included a limited time to gather data within the timelines of a college semester. In addition, the collection of data is also restricted because I only observed one elementary art teacher within one school district, and within one region of North Carolina.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I briefly described how constructivist practices could prove to be beneficial to art educators and students. The spark that ignited my desire to conduct this study was my student teaching experience in an elementary art classroom. During my student teaching experience, I was pressured to teach a structured formalist curriculum that prohibited students from having a voice in their artwork. In contrast to that type of curriculum, I wanted to examine the ways in which constructivist practices might be implemented into a K-2 art classroom, to provide students with meaningful and memorable learning experiences. Researching current and professional information regarding constructivist classrooms is essential to enhance one's comprehension of how a K-2 constructivist art classroom operates; therefore, a thorough review of literature is provided in Chapter II about constructivist classrooms.

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

### **Research Objective**

The purpose of this research was to provide a better understanding of constructivism and the benefits of implementing constructivist practices into a K-2 art classroom. This review of literature explores the studies of numerous researchers who observed the potential advantages that constructivist theory had on early childhood students and teachers. As background for this study, I began by seeking to define the term constructivism. Next, I examined child development and artistic development to discover the foundations of constructivism and to expose the capabilities of K-2 students, and the means by which many learn best. In addition, I investigated how constructivist practices could be brought into an early childhood art classroom to promote more meaningful artmaking. Finally, I compared Reggio Emilia and constructivist classrooms that discussed constructivist theories based in artistic practices. Overall, my study focused on the fundamentals of constructivist practices employed in early childhood classrooms, as well as the benefits and challenges to this way of teaching.

### **What is Constructivism?**

Constructivism is a philosophy of education. According to Marlowe and Page (1998), constructivism, as a perspective in education acknowledges that:

None of us has had exactly the same experiences as any other person, our understandings, our interpretations, and our schemata (knowledge constructs, learning) of any concept cannot be exactly the same as anyone else's. Our prior experiences, knowledge, and learning affect how we interpret and experience new

events; our interpretations, in turn, affect construction of our knowledge structures and define our new learning (p. 10).

Primarily, Marlowe and Page found that constructivist theory recognizes the fact that each individual constructs his or her own meaning and ideas. In addition, Marlowe and Page stated that constructivism also acknowledges the belief that people actively construct, invent, or create in order to learn and develop new knowledge (p. 10).

Consistent with Marlowe and Page's (1998) research, Pritchard and Woollard (2010) believed:

Constructivist teaching is based on the belief that learning occurs when the learner constructs his or her own knowledge and understanding. Learning is an active process; learning does not occur when the learner passively receives information. Learners are the makers of meaning and knowledge, not simply the receivers (p. 44).

Both Pritchard and Woollard (2010) and Marlowe and Page (1998) stressed how constructivist theory supports the idea that a child learns best when they construct their own knowledge by playing in active role in their learning process.

Pritchard and Woollard (2010) explained that when a teacher incorporates constructivist pedagogy in his or her classroom, they employ methods where learning is constructed out of cognitive processes, motivation, feedback, dialogue, and real-world problem solving (p. 45). Pritchard and Woollard expressed that through these methods, the teacher engages and further develops a student's knowledge by building off of the prior experiences and knowledge originally constructed by the individual. In addition, Pritchard and Woollard mentioned how there is a focus on building upon students' prior

knowledge and supporting student learning through scaffolding. Scaffolding as defined by Pritchard and Woollard, is when a teacher will constantly alter the level of his or her support in response to the student's level of performance (p. 47). Pritchard and Woollard believed that scaffolding imbued students with critical thinking skills important for independent problem solving in their present and future lives. Overall, the type of curriculum and activities a constructivist teacher provides supports the development of autonomy in their students (Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck, & Taylor, 2003, p. 25).

There are several noticeable differences between a "traditional" and a "constructivist" classroom. A traditional classroom setting is similar to what Freire (1970) called banking education, where students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor (p. 72). According to Brooks and Brooks (1996) research, teachers in a traditional classroom setting generally tend to take on an authoritarian role (p. 17). The teacher decides what content is to be taught and how it is to be taught to students without student participation (p. 17). In addition, Brooks and Brooks believed that students in a traditional classroom are taught to memorize the information given to them by their teacher and are not given the opportunities to discover their own understanding of a concept through personal observation, inquiry and invention (p. 17).

In contrast, in a constructivist classroom setting, the teacher and students both play the role of facilitators (Brooks and Brooks, 1996, p. ix). Brooks and Brooks explained that there is a partnership developed where the teacher and students structure the classroom environment and curriculum together. Moreover, Brooks and Brooks described how constructivist education reflects problem-posing education; "Problem-

posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation” (p. 84). In other words, in a constructivist classroom setting students’ ideas and imaginations are valued and students are encouraged to develop their own theories and solutions about the world.

Based on research by Pritchard and Woollard (2010), Marlowe and Page (1998), and Brooks and Brooks (1996) constructivism can be defined as the construction of knowledge through active participation in the learning process. The focus of a constructivist teacher is to build off their students’ prior experiences and knowledge by actively engaging them in learning activities in order to promote cognitive growth and autonomy. Psychologists and psychoanalysts’ research in early childhood development have supported and displayed the advantages of constructivist practices.

### **Early Childhood Development**

The philosophy of constructivism fundamentally sprouted out of the beliefs and research of psychologists and psychoanalysts’ in the field of early childhood development. Piaget (1953), Erikson (1963), and Vygotsky (1930) were three of the greatest instrumental advocates who essentially paved the way for constructivism. The culmination of these psychologists and psychoanalysts’ originally exposed how students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process, given initiative, and interacting with a more knowledgeable other, which are tenets of constructivism.

Piaget (1953), a renowned developmental psychologist, was among the first to investigate cognitive development in children. In his investigation, he discovered the difference between what he called “the problem of *development* and the problem of

*learning* within a classroom” (p. 8). Piaget (2003) described the development of knowledge as “a spontaneous process that is connected to the development of embryogenesis, which is the development of the nervous systems, body, and mental functions” (p. 8). In other words, Piaget expressed that a person developed knowledge by employing their physical and mental attributes to inquire and experience their surroundings.

Piaget believed that the development of knowledge occurred through operations or activities that asked students to act upon an object through past and present experience. He explained how students develop knowledge about an object by utilizing their senses and prior knowledge. In addition, Piaget said of the student, “To receive information he [*sic*] must have a structure which enables him to assimilate this information” (p. 12). As I explain below, Piaget thought that teachers should first consider the particular cognitive structures or intellectual tools, like the ability to analyze and compare, that their students needed in order to process the material being taught to them.

Development of learning was different from the development of knowledge to Piaget; he explained that learning was based on the stimulus-response schema (p. 14). Piaget stated that within the stimulus-response schema, students typically were given an incentive or a stimulus and expected to respond to it, sometimes even without a developed cognitive structure. Piaget argued that first, students should develop the structure, and then the incentive will create a response (p. 14). In other words, Piaget believed that if students did not have the cognitive abilities to process the incentive or stimulus, they would be unable to learn or develop new knowledge. As a result of his data, Piaget concluded that development of knowledge was more important than learning.

This is because developing students' cognitive structures over time provides students with the tools they will need in order to learn, investigate, and come to understand the world around them. Like Piaget, other theorists proposed various types of developmental theories such as Erikson's psychosocial development of humans.

Erikson's (1963) research in contrast to Piaget's was about the psychosocial development of a child in the classroom. Erikson, a psychoanalyst, is known for his theory on the eight ages of man that connected to society (p. 249). In relation to teaching in the first ages, Erikson discovered that early childhood students are susceptible to feeling mistrust, shame, doubt, and guilt in the classroom. Ultimately, Erikson believed that it was the teacher's responsibility to bring about feelings of trust, confidence, and initiative. Teachers, according to Erikson, "must also be able to represent to the child a deep, and almost somatic conviction that there is a meaning to what they are doing" (p. 249). He believed that when a student sees meaning in what they are doing, they develop initiative and the hunger to discover, obtain, and achieve their goals; and this relates to Piaget's theories about student initiative. "Initiative is a necessary part of every act and man needs a sense of initiative for whatever he learns and does, from fruit-gathering to a system of enterprise" (Erikson, 1963, p. 255). Erikson and Piaget thought that initiative or incentive drove students to learn and develop skills throughout their lives.

In addition to Piaget's theories on cognitive development, his collection of studies and research led him to beliefs on how a child thinks and speaks in a classroom that is centered on student independence. Piaget (1959) observed that the talking that took place in a classroom could be separated into two groups, the egocentric and the socialized (p. 9). He considered egocentric speech when students repeated words for self-satisfaction,

they did not think about the views of the other person they were talking to, nor did they address any particular audience (p. 9). Conversely, Piaget believed that examples of socialized speech were when students exchanged thoughts with others, aimed to influence others with their actions and ideas, and adapted new points of view (p. 11). Piaget's research on the differences between egocentric and socialized speech connects to Erikson's theories on student initiative. When Piaget observed students participating in socialized speech, he saw students feeling a sense of initiative or purpose in what they were learning because students were impacting the views of their classmates and teachers. Vygotsky, like Piaget and Erikson, saw the benefits of students participating in socialized speech.

Similar to Piaget, Vygotsky (1930), another well-known developmental psychologist, studied students' interactions and how they learned successfully within the classroom, but he also focused on how to assess students' developmental levels. Vygotsky declared that a student's mental development could only be determined by the difference between the actual developmental level and the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky claimed that the actual developmental level is what a student has learned independently as a result of completed developmental cycles; teachers assess the actual developmental level to establish a student's mental age (Maybin & Stierer, 1994, p. 53). When teachers assess a student's actual developmental level they test a student to find out what content they have grasped at that point in time, which only assesses what they are capable of learning on their own and does not assess what they are capable of learning through practice and interaction. However, he believed that assessing a student in this



manner did not show what the student was capable of achieving academically. Instead, Vygotsky proposed:

An essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his [*sic*] environment and in cooperation with his peers (p. 57).

Fundamentally, the zone of proximal development (ZPD) or the zone of potentially acquired knowledge is the knowledge that a child can acquire by interacting with a more knowledgeable other. Vygotsky and Piaget agreed that communication, through social interactions, played a key role in what knowledge students develop in the classroom; they believed that communication helped students not only check and verify their own views and beliefs, but it altered their perceptions and they gained new understanding. In conclusion, Piaget (1953), Erikson (1963), and Vygotsky (1930) studied a child's psychological and psychosocial development in order to better understand how to support their learning needs in the classroom. In review, their collective observations documented that students need to: develop cognitive structures to absorb content, know what they are learning in class has meaning, and work with more knowledgeable others to develop to their full potential. Furthermore, these studies have immensely influenced artistic development concepts.

## **Artistic Development**

Piaget's (1953) cognitive growth research and Vygotsky's (1930) "zone of proximal development" have served as the foundations for artistic development theories (Kindler & Darras, 1997, p. 17). In addition to Piaget and Vygotsky, art educators have also looked to Lowenfeld's (1947) stages of artistic development to grasp an understanding of artistic maturation in the early childhood years. Lowenfeld's stages categorized a child's pictorial representations based on the subject matter that they drew at a certain age. However, educational philosophers have started to argue against the accuracy of Lowenfeld's theories (p. 17). Kindler and Darras (1997), Bales and Thompson (1991), and Brent and Marjorie Wilson (1977) are among the few theorists who have questioned and developed new theories of artistic development. The new theories of artistic development support a key component of constructivism, which is the significance of acknowledging a student as an individual in the classroom (Marlowe & Page, 1998, p. 10).

Wilson and Wilson (1977), professors of art education, disagreed with Lowenfeld's stages and thought they were useless because they believed that students could not be divided and classified into certain stages or age groups based on the artwork that they were creating. Kindler and Darras (1997) agreed, and claimed that Lowenfeld's stage theories of artistic development focused on realism and required teachers to assess and classify their students on how realistically they could draw a form (p. 18). Kindler and Darras believed that there was a broad range of how students could represent a form from history and culture, and that students should not be categorized on where they are developmentally based on their drawings (p. 18). Within their research, Wilson and

Wilson (1977) and Kindler and Darras (1997) recognized and acknowledged that student-drawn forms were primarily impacted by the visual culture to which they had been exposed, therefore students' drawings could not be labeled into specific artistic developmental stages. However, this was not the only reason why Wilson and Wilson (1977) and Kindler and Darras (1997) found Lowenfeld's developmental stages useless.

Another reason Lowenfeld's developmental stages were viewed as ineffective by Wilson and Wilson, was because they failed to acknowledge the impact of society and interaction on a child's artistic development (1977). Wilson and Wilson's ideas are similar to Vygotsky and Erikson's, for the reason that they also believed interacting with others had an impact on what and how a child drew. Wilson and Wilson, Bales and Thompsons' (1991) research argued the importance of early childhood students working in groups within the art classroom to promote egocentric and socialized speech (p. 45). In this aspect, the foundation of Bales and Thompson's research utilized Piaget's theories on egocentric and socialized communication to develop an understanding of its function in preschool and kindergarten art classrooms (p. 44). Bales and Thompson found that, "Egocentric speech seems to persist as a primary means of planning and executing works of art, allowing children to formulate intentions, define problems, and adapt their expectations as a work begins to exert its own demands" (p. 53). They believed that socialized speech through interactions and class discussions within the art classroom, allowed students to exchange ideas, imitate, gain new perspectives, and tackle matters of process and pictorial imagery (p. 45). Bales and Thompsons' observations verified the importance of social interaction in preschool art classrooms; they established that egocentric and socialized speech assisted students in developing new cognitive structures,

perceptions, and technical drawing skills throughout their artistic process. Wilson and Wilson's (1981) study was further validated by Bales and Thompson's (1991) research on egocentric and socialized speech:

The developmental stages assume that there is a natural, spontaneous innate unfolding and that this unfettered and uninfluenced process is all there is; consequently, no other explanations are sought or found. In our research we have found, however, that even the youngest draftsmen [*sic*] are profoundly influenced by both each other and by graphic images from the culture (p. 5).

Wilson and Wilson established that artwork is essentially made out of borrowed or influenced imagery, a point that Lowenfeld's stages failed to acknowledge (p. 5). In addition, Wilson and Wilson (1977) observed that even when a child drew from direct observation, they were still beginning the drawing with a general configuration or a structure of composing elements that they had previously been exposed to, and then later on they would rework their drawing by examining or looking more closely at the model (p. 9). This meant, that Wilson and Wilson witnessed students pulling from previous and present experience as well as influence from their peers, siblings, and visual culture. Therefore the students' artwork jumped back and forth across Lowenfeld's developmental stages and not necessarily in chronological order, which proved that students' artwork cannot be classified in stages of growth. Wilson and Wilson's research exposed that student's personal experiences and perceptions were reflected in the imagery and quality of their artwork. In this aspect, Wilson and Wilson's research connects to constructivist theory in how it acknowledges that each student constructs his

or her own meaning and ideas in the art classroom, which are representative of how they have not had the exact same experiences in life (Marlowe and Page, 1998, p.10).

Acknowledging Piaget (1953), Bales and Thompson's (1991), Wilson and Wilson's (1977) research and incorporating their data and observations, Kindler and Darras developed a three-fold model as an attempt to conceptualize the development of pictorial representation (p. 23). In the first segment of the model, Kindler and Darras use the terms "Iconicity 1" through "Iconicity 5" to describe the pictorial imagery in the early childhood years. Each level of Kindler and Darras' model, described below explains an array of possibilities and behaviors instead of describing an exact model (p. 23).

Iconicity 1 marks the concept of a child and their actions and traces. A child sees how their acts make marks through repetition; essentially the child pursues making new movements to create new exciting mark making (p. 25). In Iconicity 2, Kindler and Darras stated that the child starts to discover relationships between marks and traces and they begin to understand the value of different types of marks (p. 26). During Iconicity 3, children between the ages of two and three years old record objects in motion and they incorporate a corresponding sound and movement (p. 28). Following this phase, a child obtains understanding that images are a form of communication and they are encouraged to include verbal, gestural, and visual cues in their artwork in Iconicity 4 (p. 31). Lastly, in Iconicity 5 the child's drawing successfully carries meaning that can be shared and it has gestural cues that support its narrative; in addition they collaboratively problem solve and imitate behavior (p. 31). Kindler and Darras stated that students in Iconicity 5, engaged in what Piaget described as social speech. During peer discussions about their artistic process, students offered suggestions and engaged in imitative behavior that

evolved into reinterpretations (p. 31). Kindler and Darras believed that these forms of communication aided students in understanding and developing their artwork (p. 31). Based on their qualitative research, the artistic development of a child cannot be classified into stages due to artistic development being greatly impacted by the culture and society in which they live. In the following section, I describe how implementing constructivist practices in an early childhood classroom supports and encourages the different developmental faculties and experiences of each student.

### **Implementation of Constructivist Practices**

According to Brooks (1986), “Constructivism can be defined as a psychologically based notion of development: we come to know our world by interacting with it and using our operative cognitive structures to ‘explain’ what we have perceived” (p. 64). For these reasons among others, Brooks believed that constructivism was built out of Piaget’s (1953) developmental theories that centered on the significance of cognitive development through experimentation, student initiative, and the benefits of student collaboration (p. 64). In order to provide a successful constructivist educational setting that thrives on cognitive development in the form of student inquiry and initiative, a teacher must focus on the curriculum. Eisner (1979), a renowned Emeritus Professor of Art and Education at Stanford University, has helped define the concerns of a constructivist curriculum.

A constructivist curriculum incorporates two of Eisner’s (1979) basic orientations: cognitive processes and personal relevance. Eisner stated that in the view of cognitive processes, “the major functions of the school are (1) to help children learn how to learn and (2) to provide them with the opportunities to use and strengthen the variety of intellectual faculties that they possess” (p. 51). In the view of personal relevance,

Eisner (1979) declared that both the students and the teacher developed the curriculum. Eisner believed that this established personal relevance for students because they would have a voice in what activities and topics were to be explored in the classroom. In addition to what Eisner expressed about a constructivist curriculum being personally relevant, Brooks and Brooks (1996) stated that within a constructivist curriculum, “Students are viewed as thinkers with emerging theories about the world...Teachers seek the students’ points of view in order to understand students’ present conceptions for use in subsequent lessons” (p. 17). When teachers value students’ perceptions the students in turn feel a sense of ownership in the classroom and it makes the curriculum meaningful to them, hence why constructivist theory is employed in applied learning projects.

Applied learning projects are utilized within a constructivist curriculum and they take place over several days or several weeks (Diffily & Sassman, 2002, p. 7). Diffily and Sassman said, “The main objective of a project is not to rush to the product but to explore the process” (p. 10). During these projects, students work together on a topic pertaining to their particular interest. DeVries and Zan (2002) also stressed the importance of a constructivist curriculum rooted in student interest:

According to Piaget, interest is central to the actions by which the child constructs knowledge, intelligence, and morality. Without interest, the child would never make the constructive effort to make sense out of the experience...Interest is a kind of regulator that frees up or stops the investment of energy in an object, person, or event (p. 63).

DeVries and Zan believed that interest was central to learning, because if it were not, students would not make much of an effort or be able to gain memorable knowledge from

the experience (p. 63). Diffily and Sassman (2002) explained how applied learning projects were beneficial to student learning because of how they were rooted in student interest.

Diffily and Sassman (2002) found that while students worked in groups to investigate their topic of interest, the students established the resources they were going to use, how to classify the information, and how to introduce to a particular audience (p. 7). In addition, DeVries and Zan (2002) discussed how student collaboration in a constructivist classroom promoted cooperation; students are asked to decenter and learn from other student's points of view (p. 69). They also believed this sense of cooperation in a constructivist classroom aided in the social, moral, and intellectual development of a child.

As Diffily and Sassman (2002) and DeVries and Zan (2002) noted, constructivist projects or activities engage the child's interests, cultivate cooperation, and encourage experimentation. DeVries and Zan (2002) found that early childhood students develop knowledge by inquiring about the physical objects in the world around them, so activities in the classroom are necessary that encourage experimentation (p. 66). For this reason, constructivist classrooms implement projects geared towards students asking questions, stating problems, observing, and recording their discoveries and answers (p 70).

A constructivist curriculum and the project-based learning they promote, has many beneficial qualities, as researchers Diffily and Sassman (2002) noted. They recognized that skills are embedded in working on projects within the curriculum that aid students in developing new vocabulary and ideas within general education (p. 12). They also observed students remembering and using skills because they were personally



involved with the topic and they had the desire to learn more about it (p. 12). In addition, they believed that group work in a constructivist classroom helps students learn how to support their beliefs and expand upon them, which involves interpersonal skills (p. 13). Diffily and Sassman also mentioned seeing students feel empowered because of how knowledgeable they felt about their topic. In conclusion, Diffily and Sassman exposed several advantages of constructivist curriculum and project-based education yet the question remains of how teachers assess what the students have learned in the constructivist classroom?

Edmiaston's (2002) research illustrated how assessment is another benefit of the constructivist curriculum. She stated that in the constructivist classroom, a teacher assesses individual student's processes of inquiry, logical thinking, and ability to use what they have learned in other areas of context (p. 55). Edmiaston declared, "A teacher's role is one of inquiry in which he or she is genuinely engaged in finding out how children think as opposed to asking questions to 'check-up' on them" (p. 60). In addition, Edmiaston proposed that teachers should not ask students or test them to find out what they have obtained in class; instead teachers should be examining and documenting how the student is thinking and problem solving during the process and what the student is learning by making these choices.

In order to conduct meaningful assessment, Edmiaston (2002) suggested performance assessments that would center on constructivist classroom activities, which would allow teachers to learn about their student's cognitive abilities by observing and documenting how their students interacted in real-life circumstances (p. 59). Edmiaston also suggested that teachers assess students' words and actions in the form of webbing—

a map each student would create to document their thought processes on a topic (p. 60). Webbing was seen as beneficial to Edmiaston because it illustrated the relationships that students had discovered between ideas, facts, and intellectual development throughout their learning process.

Furthermore, Edmiaston (2002) explained that a teacher should also analyze students' portfolios or collections of each student's products and narratives; she believed it was crucial for teachers and students to revisit events that exposed their growth over time. Edmiaston's forms of assessment in a constructivist curriculum relate back to Vygotsky's (1930) theories on a student being assessed on what they have learned throughout a period of time by interacting and learning with their peers. Vygotsky stated, "The zone of proximal development permits us to delineate the child's immediate future and his dynamic developmental state, allowing not only for what already has been achieved developmentally but also for what is in the course of maturing" (p. 54). Vygotsky believed that by focusing assessment on the zone of proximal development, teachers would be able to see what students had already developmentally attained and what structures and skills they were still in the process of developing. Edmiaston (2002) and Vygotsky's (1930) research discussed the advantages of a constructivist educational setting, but there are also obstacles one can encounter while developing the setting as Diffily and Sassman (2002) describe below.

Diffily and Sassman (2002) came across challenges to implementing projects; they discovered that occasionally students made "bad" decisions because during elementary school, students are still starting to put reasoning behind their decisions (p. 14-15). The teacher's responsibility was then to determine whether their decisions

mattered from an educational standpoint or if they should compromise (p. 15). Also, they realized that some students lost interest in their topic and occasionally the project would be revisited too much or would stall (p. 17). Furthermore in addressing the difficulties of employing project work, Diffily and Sassman mentioned that administrators have difficulty in comprehending and backing up project work and teachers might not be able to do or afford what the students want (p. 19). Diffily and Sassman (2002), DeVries and Zan (2002), and Edmiaston (2002) just mentioned a few of the benefits, struggles, and limitations that a teacher could encounter when implementing constructivist practices into their early childhood art classroom. However, they did not mention the most significant benefit of implementing constructivist practices into an early childhood art classroom, which is through employing constructivist practices art teachers provide engaging opportunities for meaningful artmaking to take place.

### **Meaningful Artwork and Constructivism**

Simpson (1996), an Art Education Professor at Boston University, explained, “Teaching children about artwork without encouraging them to make personal connections to it...is not teaching toward knowing. Making things that are seemingly related only to a world of fine art that is outside life is meaningless”(p. 56). This statement by Simpson discussed how children need an art curriculum that promotes personal connections to artwork and artmaking practices by incorporating and inquiring about students’ interests and perceptions. Simpson and Walker (2001), an Associate Professor of Art Education at The Ohio State University, both stressed that in order for an art curriculum to engage and have a purpose to students the teacher needs to incorporate and value a student’s views and interests.

Walker's (2001) research explained the relationship between artmaking practices and constructivist theory:

Artmaking conceived as an exploration and expression of big ideas reflects a constructivist approach. The implications of this are that students do not produce artworks from rote formulas or create products that have little meaning beyond the exploration of media or the development of technical skills, but instead, that students make artworks to investigate and express ideas; and, based upon constructivist practices of authentic learning based upon the real world, that students model their artmaking on that of adult artists and thereby learn how adult artists make art (p. xiv).

Walker argued that art should not be focused on the technical aspects of development, rather that art should be a meaningful exploration of how students interpret ideas and the world around them. She also explained that students should investigate historically what ideas artists have dealt with over time.

In a constructivist art curriculum, Walker (2001) believed that students needed to first be inspired by a big idea. Big ideas needed to be topics in which students could invest and be able to link to their individual experiences, backgrounds, and interests (p. 20). Walker thought that when teachers introduced this concept, they would motivate students by asking questions that had students investigate how it related to their own life. She also stated that subject matter played a huge role in the relationship between the big idea and an artist's personal connection (p. 20). What Walker meant by this, is that art teachers need to introduce subject matter that has a connection to student's prior experiences or personal interests.

Content or subject matter is highly significant in a constructivist art curriculum. Freedman (2003) like Walker, also demanded that art curriculums needed to encourage students to bring in their personal experiences and associations with the world around them to further expand their knowledge and produce new art with meaning (p. 118). Essentially, Freedman thought that teaching visual culture within an art curriculum would give students the chance to reflect on personal experiences that activated numerous levels of thought. She defines visual culture as the imagery that has and continues to envelop our world, from what we see in a museum to what we see on television, to graffiti on the side of a building. Freedman explained that visual culture is constantly influencing us, and to produce our own art we need to revisit and include images associated with our experiences, emotions, and end associated meanings; she called this *intergraphicality* (p. 121). Intergraphicality is beneficial to students because it makes the artistic process meaningful to them, their artwork becomes a piece of who they are, and they feel a sense of ownership. Prior to Freedman's (2003) discussion behind the significance of incorporating visual culture into the art curriculum, Sullivan (2002), art theorist and educator, had said:

Artistic experiences are influenced by the way our culture is composed of images that are constructed by others that reflect different ideas, values, and beliefs. Therefore visual culture involves not only learning about artworks themselves but also how others make, view, and understand art (p. 24).

Sullivan (2002) discussed how visual culture is made up of images, which are made by artists who echo diverse beliefs and perceptions. However even though we are under the

influence of visual culture, we still need to bring our own experiences and personal lens to analyzing and building off of visual culture and contemporary art. Through analysis, Sullivan believed that we become aware of the influences of visual culture and are able to closely examine them.

When it comes to looking at and interpreting visual culture and contemporary artwork in the constructivist art classroom, Barrett (2002) stood by three questions to promote productive inquiry: “What do you see?” “What does it mean?” and “How do you know?” (p. 291). Barrett believed that, “To interpret is to make meaningful connections between what we see and experience in a work of art to what else we have seen and experienced” (p. 292). He thought that personal interpretation through past and present experience, perception, and senses was significant to students finding meaning in artwork, but he also stressed that students needed to be a part of the communal interpretation as well. Barrett believed that communal interpretation allows for ideas and sources to float around and that this helped students to make a better interpretation. In addition, he believed that communal interpretation gave students a secure space that valued student ideas and this communicated to students that there are multiple ways to look at a single piece of artwork (p. 298). Walker (2001) like Barrett (2002) stressed that investigating and developing artwork through personal inquiry was of utmost importance.

Within a constructivist art curriculum, Walker (2001) believed that a teacher needed to promote the process of artmaking as an investigation with students and include aspects of constructivism such as: risk taking, experimentation, purposeful play, questioning, and postponement of the final meaning of the end product (p. 115). She thought that by incorporating these artmaking practices teachers would be encouraging

higher levels of thinking and expressing to students that artmaking is about finding meaning (p. 137). These artmaking practices are similar to Piaget's (1953) theories on students learning through experience and developing knowledge about an object by acting upon it. Except, these art practices do not occur spontaneously as Piaget found that developmental knowledge did; Walker (2001) stated that these practices are planned and encouraged through teacher instruction because students at times do not know what is expected in art making (p. 137). It is in this way that Walker's beliefs also built off of Vygotsky's (1930) on how students acquired more knowledge by interacting with a more knowledgeable other.

Walker (2001) also mentioned that following a discussion of ideas and possibilities, teachers should not pressure students to start their artwork with a predetermined meaning. Instead, teachers should let students develop meaning during the process or after his or her product is completed. How one goes about their artistic process is key to their arriving at an idea. Walker believed that this sense of artistic freedom helped students to think cognitively and that it led to research embedded in experimentation and risk taking.

In addition, Walker (2001) said that when teachers introduced a big idea or concept it created a foundation that lead to open-ended artmaking problems, which forced students to look for solutions during or after the artmaking process (p. 135). Walker believed that it was all in the way that an art teacher posed a problem; it had to be flexible enough for students to develop meaning instead of reproducing meaning that was previously known. Walker's example displayed the difference between asking a student to produce a self-portrait that shows his or her identity and asking a student to produce a

self-portrait to find out more about him or herself (p. 135). Walker explained that asking a student to produce a self-portrait to find out more about him or herself required students to decide what to expose or conceal about themselves and it asked students to question how society and other cultures might perceive them (p. 136).

Walker (2001) stated that the artwork people create in reality and the artwork our students create in the constructivist art classroom is autobiographical in the sense that it is a personal representation of themselves including their ideas, beliefs, and interests, but it is also social because their ideas and beliefs are affected by the interactions that they encounter in society (p. 22). Walker mentioned how students incorporated elements from outside of the art classroom to aid in the development of their artwork (p. 24). In this aspect, Walker related to the constructivist belief that there should be a connection between what students are learning in class and what they are experiencing in the world outside of class. According to Walker, a constructivist art classroom's goal is, "*not* to develop students into professional artists, but to structure classroom artmaking into a more meaningful activity, one based upon real-world authenticity" (p. xiv). Walker's constructivist art classroom objective, fits in with Erikson's (1963) eight ages of man because it focuses on getting across to students that the cognitive structures they develop and the information they assimilate has a purpose, and will assist them in the society they live in. Walker's (2002) constructivist art classroom goal and Erikson's (1963) eight ages of man are also found in Reggio Emilia's classrooms.

### **Reggio Emilia Classrooms**

Reggio Emilia schools were first established in a city called Reggio Emilia in northern Italy by Dr. Loris Malaguzzi (Forman, 1996, p. 172). Constructivist theory and



its base in artistic process have been incorporated to its fullest extent within Reggio Emilia schools (p. 172). Forman (1996) said, “Constructivism can be seen in the manner that these schools encourage children to dialogue themselves, to experience one another’s perspective, and to build a group understanding of a theme” (p. 172). Forman’s observations and research discussed the similarities between constructivist education and Reggio Emilia education.

The first similarity Forman (1996) mentioned is the focus to motivate students to be open to one another’s views, to have conversations, and to construct a collective understanding of a topic (p. 172). In addition, he talked about how students designed long-term projects while the teacher acted as a facilitator who could present them with many materials to be able to express their ideas and plans (p. 172). The project starts with an initial idea suggested by the students; the flexibility of the concept allows the students to bring in their interests and ideas to take the project wherever they want it to go.

Forman (1996) discussed how teachers in Reggio Emilia classrooms helped their students revisit or recall memories in order to connect to what they were currently doing in their project. Forman said, “To help children revisit their ideas, the teachers have taught them how to make their thoughts more explicit by using representational media—drawing, clay, wood pieces, simulations, cardboard, and, of course, their words” (p. 175). Teachers also jotted down comments their students said to help them just in case they forgot the following day. Essentially, Forman’s observations led him to define students’ artwork as plans:

A plan is a symbol that carries implications for the execution of action. It is more than a representation of static features of an object. The mental set

toward a plan involves translating the drawing into a sequence of actions  
(p. 179).

Forman believed that students' artwork or plans revealed how students' co-constructed knowledge and problem solved to find solutions within the process (p. 179).

In Reggio Emilia schools, Forman (1996) also illustrated how students worked in macrospaces, which helped them to negotiate through the procedures and it involved planning of the final product, in addition to taking into consideration other students' perspectives (p. 176). He believed that these common spaces asked students to find out the connection between the individual elements, which is a process in what Piaget (1953) called the development of knowledge structures (p. 176). In addition, Forman explained the significance of the community to the students; having an audience viewing the outcome of their projects gave the students motivation and made their work have more purpose (p. 181). Reggio Emilia schools, according to Forman, acknowledged and displayed the significant roles art could play in a student's learning and development when implemented with constructivist practices.

## **Conclusion**

The research by Piaget (1953), Erikson (1963), Vygotsky (1930), Kindler and Darras (1997), Thompson and Bales (1991), Wilson and Wilson (1977) displayed how constructivist practices positively accommodate student development. Constructivist practices incorporate the experiences, beliefs, and knowledge each individual student contributes to the classroom; it recognizes the impact of the environment and culture on artistic development. Constructivist practices also encourage egocentric and socialized speech that aid students in developmental and artistic growth. Studies by DeVries and

Zan (2002), Diffily and Sassman (2002), Walker (2001), Edmiaston (2002), and Forman (1996) mentioned how art played a dominant role in constructivist practices, in addition to how an art constructivist curriculum could lead to more meaningful artmaking. However, several examples discussed how constructivist practices are operated in elementary general education classrooms and secondary art classrooms, which implies the need for study of constructivist practices in a K-2 art education classroom. In my research, I plan to examine what aspects of constructivism can be found in a K-2 art classroom, the challenges art teachers face in implementing aspects of constructivism, and student's verbal and visual responses to aspects of constructivism being implemented in their K-2 art classroom. The next chapter presents the methodology used in this study.

## **Chapter III: The Design of the Study**

### **Introduction**

A range of research has been conducted that has examined the effects of constructivist practices when incorporated into general education classrooms, but there is little information on how art teachers implement constructivist practices efficiently within an early childhood setting. The central question of this study looks at what aspects of constructivism can be discovered in art classrooms. The sub questions seek to reveal the plausible outcomes of employing constructivist practices in an art education setting. For example, I would like to expose the problems and benefits that a teacher or student may encounter or experience in a constructivist art environment. I will be gathering data directly from interviewing and observing a teacher as well as examining documents. I will also be looking to bring to the surface what teachers can learn about and gain by teaching art using a constructivist approach. In order to achieve these objectives, it is vital that I take into account all of the preceding, pertinent background information associated with these areas. The following segment covers the information required in order to carry out this research.

### **Information Needed**

In order to address the research questions appropriately, initially I needed to collect copious amounts of information for my review of literature in my research. In my review of literature I studied how implementing constructivist practices in a classroom fully supported and enhanced early childhood development and artistic development. I also needed to examine and take into account other teachers' experiences, in addition to the struggles and benefits they observed or encountered while employing constructivist

practices in their own classrooms. My review of literature provided the necessary insights, as to what a constructivist classroom may look like in operation. In addition, I needed to explore how constructivist practices provided K-2 grade students with numerous opportunities to create meaningful artwork that pertained to their personal interests and perceptions. Lastly for my review of literature, I researched constructivist practices to those in Reggio Emilia classrooms. Within this chapter, I introduce the design of my study, as well as the method of inquiry.

### **Method of Inquiry**

I decided to employ a basic qualitative approach for this study. According to Merriam (2009) a basic qualitative researcher looks for these characteristics; “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). In addition, Merriam stated that data in basic qualitative research is first gathered through observations, interviews, or documents and then it is analyzed for chronic themes or emerging patterns (p. 23). In this study, I will be using these data collection methods and analyzing the data gathered for main categories. In the following section, I relate the theoretical framework that I used to structure this study.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

The adhesive that connects and holds together various elements of qualitative research is the theoretical framework. Merriam (2009) described theoretical framework as, “the underlying structure, the scaffolding, or frame of your study” (p. 66). In addition to Merriam (2009), Creswell (2013) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982) thought that theoretical framework was drawn from the theoretical lens or disciplinary stance that the

investigator carried into their study. When discussing theoretical framework, Creswell (2013) stated:

Researchers use a theoretical lens or perspective in qualitative research, which provides an overall orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class, and race (or other marginalized groups). This lens becomes an advocacy perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change (p. 62).

Creswell (2013) found that a qualitative researcher's theoretical lens had an enormous impact on how they conducted the entirety of their study.

The theoretical framework that structures this study is constructivist theory.

Merriam (2009) described constructivism or interpretivism as a philosophical perspective, where qualitative researchers assumed, "that a reality is socially constructed, that is there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event" (p. 8). This explanation of constructivism as it relates to how I am conducting my research parallels constructivism as an ideological positioning for teaching in the classroom. According to Brooks and Brooks (1996) constructivist educators shared beliefs about multiple realities and showcased them in their teaching methods by recognizing that, "each student's point of view is an instructional entry point that sits at the gateway of personalized education" (p. 60). Constructivist educators and basic qualitative researchers take into consideration how people view the world around them in different ways. In this study, I collected and analyzed data that looked at how aspects of constructivism were being employed by an art teacher in a kindergarten, first, and second grade classroom for the benefit of student learning. As well, I interpreted the

data gathered through a constructivist lens, describing student's verbal and visual reactions to the aspects of constructivism being implemented or not being implemented.

### **Site of the Study**

Ridgeview Elementary School and Central Bellville Elementary School<sup>1</sup> are located in a city in central North Carolina that I will call Pennington. Ridgeview Elementary School serves first through fifth grade and Central Bellville Elementary School serves Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten. Pennington City Schools system is a self-governing public schools district encompassed of four elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. These six schools serve a diverse population of 3,300 students in grades Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The city of Pennington is comprised of numerous locally owned businesses and beautifully preserved historic buildings, fostering a feeling of a tightly woven community.

Ridgeview Elementary School and Central Bellville Elementary School are about a 15-minute drive from one another. Ridgeview Elementary is enclosed by tall trees and is located on a deserted road away from the hub of the city. In comparison, Central Bellville is established on a slight incline in an open area at the top of a hill and is located off of a busy road of traffic closer to the city. However, both schools share a similar exterior design feature. Outside of each school's entrance there is a ring of cement blocks encompassing a cluster of flourishing trees.

The art classroom is positioned at the center of Ridgeview Elementary School; students walk quietly past it on their way to the cafeteria, main office, and the library.

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this document to protect the confidentiality of the participants and institutions.

The room is almost as long as it is wide and has two doors. Depending on where the class is going next in their day, both doors are commonly used as entrances and exits. The room does not contain any windows to let in fresh air, natural light, or a glimpse of the world outside of school. Two parallel rows of tables line the left side of the room, alternating between circular wooden tables that seat three students and black square tables that seat four students. The back of the room houses a wall of wooden cabinets, which serve as storage units for art materials. Positioned under the cabinets on the far right is one sink with a sensitive faucet. In front of the Smart Board on the right side of the room, is a worn blue rug where students sit during instructions and demonstrations.

At Central Bellville Elementary School, the art classroom is located outside, behind the left wing of the school in a doublewide trailer. The room is in a shape of a rectangle and is narrow widthwise. There are two small windows that are placed diagonally across from each other in the corners of the room, which allow for a little light in the dimly lit and cramped space. To allow for more space in the classroom, the tables were strategically placed; on the left side of the room there are three wooden circular tables each seating four students, in the middle there is one rectangular table seating up to six students, and on the right side there are two circular tables each seating four students. The back wall of the classroom contains one piece of wooden cabinetry for storage of art supplies. The tiny bathroom in the corner of the right side of the room is where the solitary sink is located. In front of the white board on the thin brown carpet are three diagonal rows of rainbow duct tape for students to sit on at the beginning of class.



## **Participant and Participant Selection**

The participant in this study was a part-time elementary art teacher at Ridgeview Elementary School and Central Bellville Elementary School in North Carolina. She holds an Associate's degree in Applied Science in Early Childhood and a Bachelor of Arts degree. Before pursuing her Bachelor of Arts degree and becoming an art teacher, she had teaching experience being a director for the childhood development center at a community college, a counselor at a children's home, and a teaching assistant at Ridgeview Elementary School and Central Bellville Elementary School. I decided to observe and study this participant and one of her kindergarten, first, and second grade art classes because she expressed that she utilized aspects of constructivism in her teaching such as: providing students with questions that required them to discuss and express their ideas about a previous concept or experience; incorporating students' interests and surroundings into the curriculum; asking students to question and analyze information in order to develop new meaning and ideas; and allowing student responses to drive lessons and shift instructional strategies, and alter content.

## **Role of Researcher**

The researcher is the key instrument for collecting and analyzing data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 175). Merriam (2009) also believed that the researcher was the primary instrument because of how a researcher could develop his or her comprehension through nonverbal and verbal communication, and summarize material (p. 15). In addition, Merriam stated that a human instrument is quick to respond, can check for accuracy of their interpretation, and further investigate responses (p. 15). Researchers may assume various roles in conducting research. Merriam described how a

researcher could play one role as observer as participant in qualitative research. In this stance, “The researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer” (p. 124). According to Merriam’s description, as an observer collecting information for this study, I took the stance of the observer as participant.

My primary focus in this study was observing participants and subtly interacting with them in order to establish a trusting and professional relationship. During the school day, I conducted observations and took elaborate field notes on three classes. I also collected teacher lessons and took photographs of student’s artwork to further study their responses to aspects of constructivism or the lack thereof. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with the teacher participant to obtain their perspective and account of this type of teaching. Upon exiting the site of study, I managed debriefing by visiting for shorter periods of time in order to maintain the relationships I had developed with the participants. The reasoning behind the data collection methods selected for this study is provided in the following section.

### **Data Collection Methods**

In order to ensure that the data I collected for this study was valid and reliable, I incorporated what is known as *triangulation*. Merriam (2009) explained triangulation as, “using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (p. 216). In this particular study, I employed a combination of observation, interview, and document analysis procedures. The data collected under each of these

research methods was compared and examined to verify emergent and consistent findings. This section explains the research methods I implemented, with observation at the forefront.

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative observations take place at the research location (p. 181). Merriam (2009) acknowledged advantages of utilizing observation as a research method, “It offers a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when combined with interviewing and document analysis allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 136). As an observer-as participant, I recorded elaborate field notes that ranged from descriptions and illustrations about the physical environment, to the participants’ behaviors, activities, and conversations. The processes of gathering data through qualitative observations were also executed in the form of Merriam’s (2009) three stages: entry, data collection, and exit (p. 122).

Interviews proved to be an equally significant data collection method alongside observation. Merriam (2009) explained, “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 88). In my basic qualitative research, I used what Merriam defined as the semistructured interview approach (p. 89). Merriam expressed that an interview is considered semistructured when the interview guide incorporates a mixture of less structured interview questions that are employed flexibly throughout the duration of the dialogue (p. 89). The questions in the interview guide (Appendix C) for this study were directed towards issues I wanted to explore. I also wanted to establish a better understanding of the participant’s perspective and interpretation. In addition, I developed open-ended interview questions and urged the participant to share personal experiences, as well as answer the questions truthfully and in

a detailed manner. I assured the interview took place in a location that was perceived as comfortable to the participant. In culmination, the interview provided pertinent data to crosscheck with observations.

To unite the findings gathered through observations and interviews, document analysis was incorporated as the third method of research. Merriam (2009) believed that all types of documents could provide qualitative researchers with new knowledge and insights related to their research problem (p. 163). In the process of this study, I made use of visual, personal, and researcher-generated documents. I collected and analyzed the teacher's lesson plans, teacher's samples, and student artwork. These documents provided a closer examination of the participant's beliefs, experiences, and views of the world; in addition they presented opportunities to learn more about the phenomenon under investigation (p. 143). Succeeding this section, I discuss other ethical issues of concern during this study.

### **Ethical Issues**

A part of being a basic qualitative researcher is being aware of ethical issues that could emerge in the research process. Bresler (1996) mentioned the assumption that there are multiple truths and realities pertaining to a phenomenon and the ways in which a qualitative researcher addressed that issue had an affect on the entire research process from data collection to analysis, and ultimately determined the stance of the artifact (p. 136). While conducting basic qualitative research through a constructivist lens, I made it a priority to understand and express the participant's varying experiences, beliefs, and views of the phenomenon, intending to present my research with a validated and detailed interpretation. At the same time, I took into consideration the biases I possibly had and

reflected as well as made readers aware of any possible detriments to the quality of this study.

Additionally, great lengths were taken to avoid ethical dilemmas during the employment of data collection methods. At the beginning of the research process, I notified the teacher that I was going to be observing them in the classroom and any field notes taken would be confidential. Documents in this study were only collected from the participants who gave their signed consent.

In being conscious of ethical issues that may surface, a researcher is required to assure confidentiality to the participants in their study. Bresler (1996) explained, “Confidentiality extends not only to writing, but also to the verbal reporting of information that the researcher has learned through observations and interviews” (p. 139). Seeking to assume the role of a compassionate researcher, I protected the participant from humiliation or harm by taking multiple steps. Before conducting research, letters of consent were sent for approval to the school district and designated faculty at the sites of study (Appendix A, Appendix B). These letters acknowledged the privacy of the participant during data collection and discussed the purpose of this study. I also took careful consideration to ensure anonymity and safety by replacing participant’s identity and sites of investigation with pseudonyms. Furthermore, the authorization of this study was officially reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

A prime consideration of a qualitative study is reciprocity, according to Merriam (2009): “It is motivated by intellectual interest in a phenomenon and has as its goal the extension of knowledge” (p. 3). Bresler (1996) also commented on reciprocity, “In the quest to increase knowledge and understanding, we should try to increase benefits and

minimize hurt” (p. 142). This study began with my desire to explore and discover the benefits of implementing constructivist practices within in early childhood art education classroom. I believed that what I learned through this process could not only enhance my teaching methods in the art classroom, but also assist other teachers in implementing constructivism into their art classrooms. Ultimately, this study is dedicated to those participants who so generously let me share their experiences that I hope will impact art education.

### **Data Management Plan and Analysis Strategies**

Early in the process of implementing the data collection methods for this study, I started employing managing and organizing strategies to permit thorough analysis of the information gathered. The field notes taken during observations were highly descriptive and recorded in a specific format each time. At the top of my field notes I established the place, purpose, date, time, and participants in attendance. Occasionally, I included diagrams of the physical environment if it was altered from the previous date of observation. These diagrams illustrated where the participants, activities, and myself were located within the classroom. Additionally, the field note protocol I used incorporated a wide margin on the right-hand side that provided the option to handwrite observer comments and reflections later in the process. The format also followed Merriam’s (2009) suggestions of leaving ample space between segments, using quotation marks, and consecutively line numbering down the left-hand side of the page (p. 130). These methods made it easier for me to read, analyze, and locate the data collected.

Interviews for this basic qualitative study were audio recorded and transcribed into a Word document. The interview transcripts, like the field notes taken during

observations, were recorded in a unique format. On the top of the first page of an interview transcript I described, where, when, and with whom the interview was conducted. Then I sequentially numbered the lines down the left-hand side of the page to the conclusion, used a double-space between speakers, put the interviewer questions in italics, and left a wide margin on the right-hand side of each page to add codes or notes (p. 110). Additionally, I took informal notes while executing the interview just in case the tape recorder happened to malfunction.

A part of my system for managing my data involved coding. I used Bogdan and Biklen's (1982) steps for developing a coding system and searched for regularities and patterns during and after collecting data, and then I assigned words or phrases to code those patterns into categories (p. 171). The coding categories consisted of the participant's perspectives concerning aspects of their site, personal experiences, and strategies being implemented in their kindergarten, first, and second grade art classrooms. In addition, the coding categories consisted of student's verbal and visual responses to the constructivist aspects being implemented or perhaps lack thereof. I took my management coding system one step further; in a binder, I separated the field notes, transcriptions, and documents that I collected under tabs of the major concepts that emerged. I established these categories as theoretically congruent and relevant to the study therefore achieving the triangulation of data as the findings emerged in collecting data.

As I was coding my data I looked for connections and answers to the research questions I originally developed at the beginning of this study. Merriam (2009) described the goal of data analysis as making sense out of data: "It involves going back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive

reasoning, between description and interpretation. These meanings or understandings or insights constitute the findings of a study” (p. 176). I began the data analysis process by utilizing what Merriam (2009) explained as open coding, or jotting down terms in the right-hand margins of my field notes and interview transcripts (p. 178). In addition to open coding, I incorporated the process of axial coding; in this process I compared related terms to form a category scheme. Through this means of data analysis, I made a consistent effort as a basic qualitative researcher to reflect, compare, and make sense out of the data collected.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this basic qualitative research is to examine what aspects of constructivism can be found in a K-2 art classroom. I inspected the ways that constructivist teaching impacted the experiences, activities, behaviors, and artwork of K-2 students. Data collection methods included observations, interviews, and documents to collect descriptive and pertinent data for this study. In order to avoid ethical dilemmas for this study, many precautions like assent and consent forms were implemented to assure safety and confidentiality to the participants during this process. Lastly, the data for this study was methodically managed and analyzed through the incorporation of coding systems to find meaning and provide answers to the research questions posed. The findings that emerged from this study are discussed in Chapter IV.



## **Chapter IV: Results of the Study**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this basic qualitative research was to examine what aspects of constructivism can be found in a kindergarten, first, and second grade art classroom. I questioned whether art teachers' implementing constructivist practices in their classrooms would benefit students developmentally and artistically, in addition to preparing students for their future endeavors. According to Pritchard and Woollard (2010), teachers who utilize aspects of constructivism in their classroom:

Tell learners why they are learning; provide opportunities to make the learner feel in control; provide opportunities for active engagement (cognitive, kinesthetic, and social); plan to use the learners' previous experiences; plan to structure the learning experience based upon understanding of the curriculum; engage with the learners through dialogue and questioning; be sensitive to the emotional aspects of learning experiences; and contextualize the activities with real-life examples (p. 48).

If an art teacher incorporated a few of these aspects of constructivism in their K-2 classes, how would it affect students and their art experience? In September 2013 I began conducting my research. I was able to locate an elementary art teacher in North Carolina who did not identify herself as a constructivist teacher, but claimed to incorporate as many constructivist aspects into her Kindergarten, first grade, and second art classes as she found humanly possible.

Each week I observed Ms. Baker, the elementary art teacher, and her students in one Kindergarten art class at Central Bellville Elementary School, and one first and

second grade art class, at Ridgeview Elementary School. As a researcher playing a role as an observer as participant in the art classes (Merriam, 2009, p. 124), I was prepared to record students' interactions with Ms. Baker, their peers, their artwork, and myself. I utilized a lecture recorder application on my MacBook Air to audio record individual art classes. In addition, I circulated through every class with my observational journal in hand, taking abundant notes on student and teacher interactions and behaviors. As Ms. Baker and her students were engaged in class discussions and one-on-one interactions, I would write down significant quotes or thoughts that presented themselves. Nearing the end of my study, I interviewed Ms. Baker on three separate occasions.

My objective through observing and participating in student and teacher interactions was to discover how K-2 students reacted to the implementation of constructivist practices in the art classroom. Students' responses, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to the methods and strategies utilized by Ms. Baker were studied and documented. My objective through interviewing Ms. Baker was to gain insight on her educational background and teaching philosophy, as well as, to discover what influenced the constructivist methods and strategies of instruction that she was able to incorporate into her K-2 art classes.

During the course of my research I observed, documented, analyzed, and compared the occurrences in one kindergarten class over a seven-week period, one first grade class over a seven week period, and one second grade class over a ten week period. The following sections in this chapter, document my thorough examination of classroom occurrences, teacher interviews, lesson plans, teacher's samples, and student artwork. During analysis of the data collected, three major categories emerged.

## **Ridgeview Elementary School Setting**

The art classroom is situated in the middle of a busy intersection in between the main office, the library, and the cafeteria. The art classroom is organized and enlightening, presenting a comfortable atmosphere where new concepts and ideas provoke student interaction and inspire creativity. Arranged on the outside of the wooden art classroom door are bright bubble letters that read, “ART AND DESIGN.” Below this caption is a small poster displaying a photograph of Josh Sarantitus’s mural titled, “Reach High and You Will Go Far.”

Three opaque plastic windowpanes to the left of the art classroom door serve as the Ridgeview Elementary Gallery, displaying student artwork capturing fluctuating colors of crayon, imagery, and imaginations of students that lay beside a printed black and white image of Harold from the book *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson. The student’s artwork is not labeled by the classroom teacher’s name or grade, instead it is branded with a NC state standard, “I will read and write with making art.”

Numerous posters depicting artwork and text representing the elements and principles of art and design cover the eggshell colored cement brick walls and cabinetry. Only one bright blue poster behind the door in the corner of the classroom inquires student’s perceptions about art, “What is art? Who makes art? Why do people make art? Where is art made? When was art made? And how is art made?” A single display specifically meant for third grade students has a photograph of Egyptian artwork with a question above it, “What does this art make you wonder?”

Second grade students wait quietly outside the art classroom doorway until Ms. Baker ushers them inside. Ms. Baker instructs students to sit in rows of five on the worn

blue carpet in front of the Smart Board and then proceeds to guide students to their spot. Keisha mentions how cold she is on the rug and Ms. Baker replies cheerfully, “All right. I know it switched from heat to air, it does that everyday about this time, but we won’t be on the carpet for that long. All right? We are going to start learning today about books that get a *special medal* for their illustrations! Raise your hand if you can tell me what an illustration is.” Ms. Baker looks around for raised hands and calls on Elizabeth, “Elizabeth...that’s right, stand and deliver.” The art classroom at Ridgeview Elementary School focused on developing first through fifth grade student’s critical thinking skills, in addition to enhancing their art vocabulary and knowledge of art history. In the following section, I thoroughly describe the differing art classroom environment at Central Bellville Elementary School.

### **Central Bellville Elementary School Setting**

The art classroom is located in a doublewide trailer, behind the left wing of the elementary school; it sits diagonally across from another doublewide trailer where the music classroom resides. The art classroom is its own little island, full of exciting art materials that few kindergarten students have ever seen or used before. Masking taped to the white wooden art classroom door is a piece of oak tag paper that reads, “The Art Room Pete is painting in his school shoes! Pete is painting in his school shoes! Pete is painting in his school shoes!”

Green capital letters above the white board in the art classroom read, “WELCOME TO THE ART ROOM.” Posters of multiple shapes in bright colors line the wall to the left side of the white board; on the opposite side there are posters displaying recognizable objects like stop signs, pumpkins, and sunflowers, which are then

categorized by the color's name. A large poster of Mondrian's artwork sits on the giant easel positioned next to the white board and Eric Carle's watercolor animals liven up an area on one of the dull gray walls. A couple of the kindergartener's tissue paper collages from the previous year take residence in the corner behind Ms. Baker's desk.

The door to the art classroom swings ajar, a little boy releases it's knob with a smirk on his face and the rest of his kindergarten class waiting eagerly behind him. As the students enter the art classroom one by one, Ms. Baker greets them with a smile on her face and directs them to where there spot is on one of the three diagonally placed rainbow duct tape lines that are situated across the thin brown carpet in front of the whiteboard. A few students walk with heavy feet thoroughly enjoying the loud sound they make on the hollow floor beneath them. A majority of the students' eyes' scan and examine the different materials and tools they see placed on each table, puzzles, books, paintbrushes, and crayons.

When all of the students are sitting quietly in three rows, Ms. Baker exclaims happily and loudly over the buzz of the air conditioning "Ok guys! Let me have your attention up front. Last week we talked about the lines and shapes that we saw in this artwork (she points to the poster displaying Mondrian's artwork on the easel). And we sang our song, which we are going to sing again real quickly to remember about the directions that lines go in." Then Ms. Baker asks joyfully, "So could everyone show me your straight lines again?" Students enthusiastically mimic Ms. Baker as she puts her extended index fingers side-by-side. The art classroom at Central Bellville Elementary School provided kindergarten students with a comfortable and playful atmosphere to begin learning about and exploring art; the learning centers of multiple materials

encouraged students to utilize critical thinking skills, such as experimentation, analysis, and deriving a conclusion. The challenges Ms. Baker confronted in implementing aspects of constructivism in her art classroom at Ridgeview Elementary School and Central Bellville Elementary School are discussed in the next section.

### **Challenges in Implementing Aspects of Constructivism**

Teachers who pursue implementing aspects of constructivism into their classroom believe that students learn best when they construct their own knowledge by playing a significant and active role in their learning process. Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck, and Taylor (2003) stated that these teachers recognize, “That learning occurs as children interact with the environment, including classroom materials, the people in the environment, and the ideas of those people and of the teacher” (p. 16). Unfortunately as Brooks and Brooks (1996) explained, teachers will encounter challenges in incorporating aspects of constructivism, such as cooperative learning strategies, into their own classrooms,

Although there exists a growing interest in cooperative learning in America’s schools, most classrooms structurally discourage cooperation and require students to work in relative isolation on tasks that require low-level skills, rather than higher-order reasoning. Think about, for example, the elementary classrooms which students sit alone for portions of almost every day completing workbook and ditto sheets (p. 7).

Brooks and Brooks touched on obstacles that teachers might face within their school district-its beliefs and curriculum. In conducting my research, I found that there could be several challenges that may make it difficult for an art teacher to bring in aspects of

constructivism into their kindergarten through second grade classes including, time and scheduling constraints; teaching multiple grade levels within one classroom, the state standards; the art budget; and the student population.

Ms. Baker is a strong advocate for Montessori education and constructivist theory as she revealed in an interview about her educational beliefs,

There needs to be more creativity, more guidance from the children. It needs to be more child led and there's a lot of lip service paid to that, but it doesn't actually happen, and the reason it doesn't actually happen is because we're given these guidelines by people who don't actually teach. And so, my philosophy is that children know how to learn if we would just get out of their way and let them, because think about it, babies are born, they know how to learn. We don't have to teach them how to walk, we don't have to teach them how to talk; *they* do it and will *keep* doing it.

Ms. Baker believed that standards set by state education officials are stifling student's initiative to learn. Piaget (1959) and Erikson (1963) expressed that students need a sense of initiative in the classroom in order for them to learn and develop skills; this shared belief served as the foundation for the educational philosophy of constructivism. Ms. Baker sought to incorporate several constructivist aspects into her art classroom, such as the implementation of learning centers per each grade level, in addition to more choice-based art activities where students were able to pursue their ideas and interests in their artwork. Ms. Baker thought that these activities would help K-2 students to see meaning in what they were doing in the art classroom, thus developing their sense of initiative. Furthermore, some of Ms. Baker's learning centers and choice-based activities

acknowledged students as individuals, which is also an element of constructivism (Marlowe & Page, 1998, p. 10). However, Ms. Baker continually expressed that one of the reasons she struggled in implementing more constructivist aspects into her art classroom was because of the time and scheduling constraints she faced.

In fact, before I even began conducting my research in Ms. Baker's K-2 art classes, Ms. Baker had acknowledged her battle with time and scheduling restrictions. Upon making my decision to observe Ms. Baker, I asked her through e-mail if she utilized numerous aspects of constructivism within her art classroom, and her response to my question was simply, "The main issue I have is time" (personal communication, August 28, 2013). During an interview with Ms. Baker, we had a brief discussion about what and who played a role in the development of her art classroom schedule. Ms. Baker informed me that the principals of the two elementary schools had decided how long the art blocks were, in addition to the overall scheduling. When I asked if it went higher than the principals Ms. Baker replied,

They may decide that with central office...that was actually decided three years ago when this was all set up. So, I'm assuming they got together then and made that decision, because it's based on the amount of time that the classroom teachers' needed for planning.

In Ms. Baker's circumstance, she was not asked for her input in the development of her art classroom schedule. Instead, the decisions had been made by each of the elementary school principals and central office of the school district, which according to Ms. Baker had been ultimately based on how much planning time they believed classroom teachers needed. The art classroom being put into place to provide general education teachers with



more planning time, suggests that art is not a valued subject in either of these elementary schools. The schools and staff in this situation did not hold art in high regard as compared to other subjects, and this could have very well reflected in students' attitudes toward art. Occasionally, I witnessed first and second grade students in Ms. Baker's art classroom not take their artwork seriously. Students would fool around with one another and the art materials; in addition they would fail to listen or abide by Ms. Baker's rules and directions.

As Efland (1976) explained,

What I suspect is that the school art style tells us a lot more about schools and less about students and what's on their minds. If this is so, then maybe we have been fooling ourselves all along. We have been trying to change school art when we should have been trying to change the school! (p. 43)

Efland found that how schools and staff viewed art, impacted students quality of artwork and how students regarded art (p. 40). Efland wrote, *The School Art Style: A Functional Analysis* in 1976, which shows how this issue of art and its value in schools is still prevalent in the year 2013.

The central office and elementary principals that designed Ms. Baker's schedule (Appendix D) made it so that she spent her mornings teaching first through fifth grade art at Ridgeview Elementary School, followed by teaching art to kindergarten in the afternoons at Central Bellville Elementary School. Ms. Baker saw each of her classes one day a week, sometimes not even that with required school drills, holidays, teacher workdays, and parent-teacher conference days. Ms. Baker explained in more depth during

an interview, and how classes missing a day affected students, her unit lessons, and her teaching.

*Ms. Baker:* I have four fourth grade classes and none of them are together; neither class is at the same place as another class. They are all at a completely different place, because something has been happening during all those days—It is ridiculous! It is completely ridiculous!

*C.S.:* Your...teaching four different lesson plans per grade level?

*Ms. Baker:* Yes, exactly! Exactly, one grade level! Like the fourth grade class that just left, there was a week two weeks ago; they decided to have the fire drill and the lockdown drill during 4<sup>th</sup> period, so they came for ten minutes! I had them for ten minutes, so they're completely off track. Wednesday is on track and Thursday last week, I had them for twenty minutes and then they had the Shrek play, which I had forgotten to check the calendar and I didn't realize they were doing that. And then, Monday's class has missed two Mondays, so they're like two weeks behind. So none of them are at the same place. The thing is, I have stopped trying to do individual lesson plans, because there's just no sense. I'm doing more of a unit, so I know that we're all doing this landscape thing, but I know that each one of them is at a different place in it and I just have to try to keep that in my head or jot it down somewhere, and say ok, we're at this point. Except for Monday's fourth grade class, the next Monday they're painting their pots. They just made their pots, so they won't even start the landscape unit until the Monday before Thanksgiving.

*C.S.:* So they're how many classes behind?

*Ms. Baker:* Three classes behind. (November 5, 2013)

Ms. Baker described in the past how she felt pressured into teaching her curriculum in the form of individual lesson plans, during the allotted 45 minute to 30-minute class times. Ms. Baker quickly realized that teaching this amount of content in such a miniscule time frame was not efficient; as a result she began conducting units. Ms. Baker found that managing a unit provided her and the K-2 students with more flexibility in terms of time, to get objectives accomplished. However even though units provided Ms. Baker and her students with more time, it was still not enough to make up for lost class time. With Ms. Baker's schedule, if a class was three classes behind it also meant that those students had not been in the art classroom for three weeks. Ms. Baker expressed that this was not only difficult for her in terms of getting students caught up, but also difficult for students to be able to reconnect to their artwork and recall what they had previously learned. Ms. Baker explained how she occasionally found herself taking objectives out of a unit to get a class caught up with the rest of their grade level, instead of rushing students through their artistic process. During the same interview, Ms. Baker explained her solution to getting a first grade class caught up,

My first grade this week, they're doing their writing piece that's what they're doing today. This is their evaluation so; they're doing their sequence writing, how I made, how I painted my seascape—And so, they're supposed to write how they painted their seascape. But then I have my Monday class, which hasn't finished painting their seascape yet, so that's what they're doing next Monday, they're finishing. So, I'm thinking about just dropping their writing, so I can get my first

grade class back on track, which is probably what I'll do, just stop the writing piece.

In instances like this for example, Ms. Baker expressed how she was forced to hurriedly push onward in a unit, because only so much time was allotted to classes to begin with, in addition to the amount of concepts she was expected to cover in the curriculum. The writing piece in this first grade unit (Appendix K), connected to NC state standards for the visual arts and for English language arts. First grade students would have written about their artistic process and about the imagery they incorporated. It would have given students a chance to critically analyze their artwork as well as develop their handwriting and spelling skills. Unfortunately, because Ms. Baker's predetermined schedule did not present her with time to make up art classes, this made it difficult for her to provide all her classes per grade level with the same learning experiences and opportunities.

As described previously, Ms. Baker's first through fifth grade classes were only 45 minutes long, and kindergarten classes were 30 minutes long. I found that this small amount of time provided to each art class once a week, was further shortened by several classroom teachers who repeatedly dropped their students off three to five minutes late. On one occasion, the kindergarten class arrived ten minutes late, which only gave Ms. Baker ten minutes to demonstrate how to use materials and explain to students what they would be creating at each of the eight centers, five minutes for students to create artwork at only one center, and five minutes for students to clean up their centers and get lined up at the door. This miniscule window of a time, made even smaller by classes not arriving on time, presented Ms. Baker with little instruction time to cover concepts, and little to no time for students to interact, observe, experiment, and learn while creating their artwork.

In an interview, Ms. Baker described how she would have scheduled her art blocks in an ideal world; confirming subtly how the amount of time that she was given with students was inadequate.

*Ms. Baker:* I would continue with 45 minutes, but I'd have at least two per week. I would like to have at least two per week, because once a week it's just, there's not enough time. And, I would never let them be preempted for other things, because that happens so frequently. (November 5, 2013)

Another issue that Ms. Baker confronted in her prearranged classroom schedule was that the vast majority of her classes had been arranged back-to-back. On numerous instances, Ms. Baker would find herself responsible for two classes at one time. Ms. Baker would be teaching a class on the carpet in front of the Smart board, while the previous class she had would be standing in line at the doorway, waiting to be picked up by their classroom teacher. This also meant that Ms. Baker did not have any time between classes, which prevented her from being able to prepare and set out materials before each class's arrival. Ms. Baker described the most important thing that she was taught in early childhood education in relationship to this issue of time and setting up materials, in an interview we had.

*Ms. Baker:* For me, I think probably that the environment they're (the students) in, is as important as what I do. It still carries on today, because I spend as much time in this room and at home, planning and prepping what's going to happen and setting up the materials for it to happen, as I do teaching. This is because I want the experience that happens for them to be kind of seamless, that they don't have to sit around waiting for me to get something

ready, you know? Because part of preschool is, you have these centers and you set them up, so the learning happens *without you*. You know? That they can kind of create that learning for themselves and that is probably the thing from working with preschoolers that still carries on with what I do with kids today. (October 29, 2013)

It proved to be easier for Ms. Baker to execute the seamless centers she desired for students at Central Bellville Elementary School. The only grade level Ms. Baker taught there was kindergarten, so she didn't have to change the artistic tools and mediums placed at individual centers in the classroom for each art block. The student-guided centers that Ms. Baker discussed are representative of constructivism, as described by Brooks and Brooks (1996),

The teacher's responsibility is to create educational environments that permit students to assume the responsibility that is rightfully and naturally theirs.

Teachers do this by encouraging self-initiated inquiry, providing the materials and supplies appropriate for the learning tasks, and sensitively mediating teacher/student and student/student interactions. But the teacher cannot take sole responsibility for students' learning (p.49).

According to Brooks and Brooks, the teacher's responsibility in a constructivist classroom is to provide students with the necessary materials and encouragement, and the student's responsibility is learning through using their critical thinking skills. I found that even though Ms. Baker was able to incorporate centers that offered her kindergarten students varying artistic tools and materials, the centers were not student-guided like she had described. The kindergarten centers were teacher-guided, in the way that Ms. Baker

explained to students what they were expected to create at each center at the beginning of class. I discovered that Ms. Baker felt obligated to instruct centers in this manner to incorporate state standards and concepts (Appendix G), however this went against the educational philosophies of constructivism and Montessori teaching methods. Even though Ms. Baker's centers were seamless like she had preferred, the content and methods used in centers did not give kindergarten students the opportunity to explore on their own. Unfortunately, Ms. Baker found it difficult to make classroom activities seamless at Ridgeview Elementary School while teaching five different grade levels consecutively.

Ms. Baker would go to Ridgeview Elementary School when the janitors opened it at 6 a.m., an attempt to get prepared for each class's individual units. Ms. Baker made an effort to put most of the basic artistic tools that each grade level would need in plastic containers on each table such as, scissors, pencils, and glue sticks. However, I found that Ms. Baker tended to struggle with units containing watercolor or paint. On average, it took Ms. Baker about 8 minutes to set up materials for watercolor or painting units even with the help of one or two students. I also discovered on multiple occasions that any wait time in the classroom resulted in student misbehavior, because students became impatient when they could not begin their artwork right away. Instead Ms. Baker could have taken a more constructivist approach, by having her first through second grade students be accountable for getting their own artistic tools and materials at the front of the classroom everyday, which would have resulted in students being in charge of their own learning, and additionally, may have resulted in better student behavior. DeVries and Zan (1994) explained how students in a constructivist classroom feel a sense of ownership

and responsibility that further promotes their development (p. 59). The ways in which Ms. Baker took sole responsibility for the students' learning and took full ownership of the classroom, exposed that she may have had an unclear understanding of constructivism and how it was to be implemented into the art classroom.

One instance where second grade students misbehaved as a result of waiting for artistic tools and materials to be passed out, was during a unit titled, "Illustrators are Artists: Caldecott Watercolors" (Appendix N). Students had already received their watercolor brushes, watercolor paint palettes, as well as drawings; Ms. Baker was now in the process of pouring water into a container at each table. As students waited for their water, they started to become restless and began fooling around. A couple of students jokingly started using their watercolor brushes as shovels, digging them into their dry paint palettes. A few students began carelessly tossing or rolling their paintbrushes onto the floor like toys. In this case, the wait time that occurred due to lack of transition time to prep materials, proved to have a negative affect on student behavior. This example displays how frustrating and challenging it was for Ms. Baker to implement seamless activities for her first through fifth grade art classes, because of her back-to-back scheduling.

As previously mentioned, Ms. Baker was able to implement learning centers in her kindergarten art classroom at Central Bellville Elementary School. At a point in an interview, Ms. Baker and I briefly discussed what else besides the lack of transition time, made it hard to employ centers, in her first through second grade art classroom at Ridgeview Elementary School.



C.S.: I know you have centers in kindergarten, but so far I haven't seen them in first or second grade.

*Ms. Baker:* The centers of course in kindergarten are different mediums. Given the way things are here (Ridgeview Elementary School), I just can't really set up like that as much. If I could do it for every grade level, what I'd prefer to do is have like a painting center set up, a printmaking center set up. Um...I meant to send you that other list of websites. I'll send you the Teaching for Artistic Behavior website, which shows how to set up like that. But given the way the standards are, I can't do that all year long because it would be completely child choice, where they would come in and they would choose their center, and they would choose what they wanted to make. Given the way the standards are, I can't let them go that way and you know that would be my preferred way of teaching. But you know with kindergarten we can a little bit, because the standards are a little more on exploration with materials, so it's a little easier to get away with it. Plus we only have that one grade level. (November 5, 2013)

Ms. Baker acknowledged that the other problem in being able to implement learning centers in her first through fifth grade centers was the interference of state standards. At this point in time, there were three strands that aligned the North Carolina Essential Standards for the Visual Arts, visual literacy, contextual relevancy, and critical response. In kindergarten as Ms. Baker explained, the standards focused on students exploring and learning how to use different artistic tools and mediums in the art classroom. In first and second grade however, the standards began to veer away from experimentation in the art classroom, because of how they wanted students to build upon the basic knowledge and

skills students had previously developed in kindergarten. The standards became more structured as the grade levels advanced in the art classroom. In first and second grade specifically, it was more about teaching students concepts in the art classroom and less about student experimentation and student-centered or guided activities. However, Ms. Baker could have taught K-2 students' concepts in the form of a big idea, while employing student-centered activities. Brooks and Brooks (1996) described a big idea as a whole in constructivism,

When concepts are presented as wholes, students seek to make meaning by breaking the wholes into parts that *they* can see and understand. Students initiate this process to make sense of the information; they construct the process and the understanding rather than having it done *for* them (p. 47).

If Ms. Baker had taken a more constructivist approach and had not severed the big idea or concept into parts and introduced it as a whole, it would have let her K-2 students explore the concept on their own. Ms. Baker's K-2 students in this situation would have taken on the role of severing the big idea into parts on their own, thus making it a more meaningful and memorable learning experience.

In Ms. Baker's ideal world if these standards did not present her with restrictions, she had stated her desire to utilize Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), which is a choice based art education approach. TAB is similar to constructivist theory and Reggio Emilia classrooms in the way that it, "regards students as artists and offers them real choices for responding to their own ideas and interests through the making of art" (Teaching for Artistic Behavior, 2013). TAB also arranges the classroom into individual centers of artistic mediums to give students autonomous learning opportunities. After

examining the TAB approach and comparing it to the constructivist approach, I discovered a significant difference. When the TAB approach is implemented into an art classroom, the students decide on what subject matter they will incorporate into their artwork, in addition, students decide on what artistic tools and mediums they will use to create their artwork. However, the TAB approach does not ask students to build upon their prior knowledge or explore new concepts or ideas. When the constructivist approach is implemented into a classroom, students are provided with opportunities of choice, but students are also asked to explore and develop new knowledge about a concept or idea. Constructivism asks students to build upon prior knowledge and take into consideration new concepts and ideas. The overall difference that I found between the TAB approach and the constructivist approach is about challenging students and providing them with opportunities to gain new understanding.

Ms. Baker explained how she would have designed her art classroom around the TAB approach in an ideal world, and how arranging it in such a way, would have proven overall to be beneficial for student learning and growth.

*Ms. Baker:* There would be centers, there would be a painting center, there would be a printmaking center, there would be a drawing center...and that way the kids would come in and they would find the media that they liked to work with and perfect their experience with that. I mean you know, because there are some kids who would rather work with clay than anything else. There are kids who would rather—Of course there is a draw back to that, in that some kids would never draw. You would have to try to put some sort of restraint on that, where they would have to spend some time maybe at each center in the

beginning. Part of that is introducing the centers, and that's one of the things that the teaching for artistic behavior goes through, that you open up each center with demonstrations to the students of how it's to be used. As you go through the year you start with each center and open it up, but that would be my ideal world.

Ms. Baker mentioned that if she had the opportunity to implement the TAB approach, students would be able to decide on what artistic tools and mediums they worked with every art class. Ms. Baker believed that if a student kept revisiting a center out of interest, they would perfect their experience or gain mastery over the artistic tools and mediums at that center. Although at the same time, Ms. Baker mentioned her concerns with the TAB approach and letting students decide what artistic tools and materials they would use every art class. Ms. Baker realized that the TAB approach could result in students only deciding to go to one center, instead of exploring the multiple possibilities and challenging themselves with artistic tools and mediums at other centers.

*C.S.:* Ok and how do you think that would benefit students? You touched on that a little bit.

*Ms. Baker:* I think that it would benefit their creativity, their sense of ownership of what they do, their sense of competence. That they would build a sense of, I can figure out what I want to do and I can carry it through myself. You know, I can plan it myself and then if I make a mistake, I can go back and fix it, and that what I make is completely mine and nobody else thought it out. Nobody else assigned it to me; it's completely my expression,' which is what art should be ultimately. (November 5, 2013)

In this interview Ms. Baker described her philosophy in terms of expressionism in student artwork. Ms. Baker believed that an artist's artwork should be a reflection of their experiences, beliefs, perception, and thoughts. Ms. Baker's philosophy in terms of expressionism in artwork relates to constructivism. Walker (2001) discussed how in a constructivist art classroom, the art teacher's primary focus is to introduce a concept or big idea to which each student could link their individual interests and experiences to. Walker further explained, "Infusing artmaking with the personal represents a range that can extend from the autobiographical to the social" (p.22). Ms. Baker wanted her K-2 students to take pride in creating autobiographical and society influenced artwork, which displayed student's personal interests, experiences, and thoughts.

In addition to the State Standards that restricted Ms. Baker in being able to implement more constructivist aspects and the TAB approach in her art classroom for the benefit of her students, Ms. Baker also faced another obstacle, which was her art classroom budget. As explained before, Ms. Baker taught six different grade levels, a grand total of 494 students. This year, Ms. Baker received no money from the state or district to supply art materials to her 494 students. In an informal conversation before her first grade class arrived one day, Ms. Baker explained,

I've got stuff that the teachers have given me over the years. I've had stuff leftover, like the first couple of years that I taught as an assistant here; they gave me about \$400.00. The first year that I taught as a teacher here they gave me a little bit of money. And then I had money that was donated by a family member that was matched by their company, and I saved that, which was good because I used that all up last year, because I didn't get any money here.

Later on in this conversation, Ms. Baker exposed her frustration with the lack of money provided to her and she also mentioned another family member who graciously gave her \$500.00 for supplies this year.

*Ms. Baker:* It's one thing when you have 20 kids, but when you have 500? And everything you do involves usable materials, you know? So, I buy stuff; and my son, his company's doing well, and he's always willing to buy me stuff, and I'm just not a buy me things person... This time when he offered to buy me something, I just said well how about this? And he said of course and I said yay! I mean it's just stuff like construction paper and watercolors for my fourth graders, because they're getting ready to do landscapes—And we're doing watercolor landscapes, so I need 16 watercolor palettes for them.

*C.S.:* I replied in a calm tone, "It's just the essential things that you need that you are really getting (with her son's donation)?"

*Ms. Baker* exclaims, "Yeah! It's like I went to Hobby Lobby yesterday to pick up paper to paint on, because I can't have the kids painting on construction paper it would fall apart!"

Several weeks later in an interview with Ms. Baker, we discussed the problems of limited materials on her teaching, lessons, and student's art experience.

*C.S.:* Do you find it hard that you only have so many materials to work with and you don't want to exhaust them on one material?

*Ms. Baker:* Yes, because I wonder ok you know, not only about this year and then I don't know about next year. You know? It's like you don't know next year what's going to happen. I mean that's one of the reasons lesson plans could

never be static, because my lesson plans have to be based on what I have. Well what do I have to work with?

*C.S.:* So how would that impact your students if they...I mean what would be different for them if they did have all of these materials available to them, how would that benefit them?

*Ms. Baker:* I just think I would probably feel less restricted, like when it comes to paper for one thing, like with drawing paper, I'm always like ok use both sides. We're getting ready to do print making with second grade, so they will probably only to begin with—We will probably only pull one print at a time. Whereas, I might let them pull multiples if I had enough paper to give them more practice with it.

*C.S.:* Do you feel like your limited by the budget?

*Ms. Baker:* Yeah, so their experience is limited. You know?

*C.S.:* What they can do and how much they can do it?

*Ms. Baker:* Exactly. (November 5, 2013)

As Ms. Baker explained, having limited art supplies and no art budget for her elementary classrooms this year had an affect on what she was able to teach and how often students got to practice with and explore different artistic tools and mediums. This challenge greatly impacted student's artistic experience, as well as their growth and development of artistic skills in Ms. Baker's art classroom.

Time and scheduling constraints, teaching multiple grade levels in one classroom, the state standards, and the lack of a budget, were just some of the challenges that Ms. Baker confronted on a daily basis. Although these obstacles made it difficult for Ms.

Baker to incorporate the TAB approach and as many constructivist features as she would have liked, Ms. Baker made a constant effort to employ as many as she could in her kindergarten through second grade art classes. However, aspects of constructivism and additional strategies that Ms. Baker utilized in her kindergarten through second grade art classes, led to student empowerment as discussed in the following section.

### **Empowering Students: Teacher Expectations and Student Responses**

An essential component of constructivism is promoting the development of student autonomy through various instructional methods, in addition to a student-centered curriculum and educational environment. According to Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck, and Taylor (2003), “Being able to speak for oneself, make decisions, and live independently are only parts of autonomy” (p. 24). After thorough examination of my data, I discovered that in order for kindergarten through second grade students to become independent or autonomous learners in the art classroom, they had to first develop a feeling of empowerment in their artistic abilities and artwork. I found that Ms. Baker successfully employed three different strategies that provided her kindergarten through second grade students with the opportunity to build a sense of confidence in the art classroom. At the beginning of every unit per grade level, Ms. Baker utilized two strategies that intertwined with one another; teaching students how to use artistic tools and mediums, and breaking down the artistic process into steps for students. These two corresponding strategies are described in the section below.



**Providing Students with Artistic Knowledge, Skills, and Steps.** As previously mentioned, Ms. Baker spent a significant amount of time in her kindergarten through second grade art classes introducing and demonstrating verbally and visually how to utilize artistic tools and mediums. On average, I found that Ms. Baker devoted about 10-15 minutes of this instructional strategy per unit, per grade level. In interviews and informal conversations, Ms. Baker expressed to me that she put a lot of emphasis on students learning how to use the artistic tools and mediums for several reasons.

An informal discussion before class told me why Ms. Baker found it necessary to instruct in this manner for her kindergarten students. Ms. Baker explained to me that several students in her kindergarten classes had never gone to pre-school or pre-kindergarten. In addition, Ms. Baker shared that quite a few of these students had just moved to the area from Mexico and knew little English. Following this Ms. Baker professed woefully, “Some of these students have never held or painted with a paintbrush before, so the beginning of the school year is really an introduction to materials and how to use them in the art classroom.” Ms. Baker fully acknowledged her kindergarten students lack of experience and knowledge about making art, and artistic tools and mediums. Ms. Baker addressed this issue and gave her kindergarten students the chance to gain confidence with artistic tools and mediums, not only by providing them with detailed demonstrations of techniques, skills, and concepts, but also through establishing centers in the art classroom. The centers, focused on various artistic tools and mediums, gave Ms. Baker’s kindergarten students the chance to gain mastery at their level through experimenting, practicing, and exploring (Appendix G).

During an interview Ms. Baker expressed two additional reasons why she believed strongly in teaching her kindergarten through second grade students, how to use artistic tools and mediums in her art classroom.

*Ms. Baker:* One of the things when I first started...I felt I learned that if I just let them have at it, they got frustrated, because they couldn't get—They couldn't *create* what they wanted to, because they didn't know how to use the materials, because they would with paint, they would end up with just mud. You know, that type of thing? Because they didn't have knowledge about the material and how to use it, and I want them to feel—I very much want them to feel competent with the materials, so that they *can* create what they want to. And so, that's one of the reasons for the steps, taking them through. This is my thing, and I tell—I even tell adults this, I feel that anybody can learn to do anything if they have motivation, if they have the right tools, and if they know the steps. I feel like you can learn to do anything in the world, if you have those three things, and steps are a very important part of that. You know? But the right tools are important too and that's where I really struggle, because I feel like it's very important for them to end up with something that they're proud of, that they have the right materials to make it with to begin with.

*C.S.:* Yeah and I didn't think about that until I was in here, and I was [thinking], I'm glad she's showing them how to do that, because now I feel like they have...they've mastered how to use it (the artistic tools and mediums) and now—

*Ms. Baker:* Oh yeah! They get that sense of accomplishment inside, you know? Because otherwise, they would mix all those colors together and then they would

be trying to paint with red and they wouldn't be able to get red, because it would be all mixed up and they would be looking at what they had done and not feel good about it so...

*C.S.:* Interesting...that's funny because you forget that they don't know that yet. They don't know that mixing all these colors together is not going to give them what they want.

*Ms. Baker:* Exactly. Well it's like my college professor, when I was taking my painting class this summer, because I was doing oil painting and he was like you know, he said—And this is true with them too, you know, you have to learn the right things to do first and then you can do your way. You know? You can come up with your own way, but you have to learn the right steps and then you can break the rules. You know? Learn the rules first, before you can break them. (October 29, 2013)

Ms. Baker found that it was important to first address her K-2 students on how to use the artistic tools and mediums, because of the student's lack of experience working with them. In this aspect, Ms. Baker's decision played into ideas of constructivism established through Vygotsky's (1930) theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky believed that, "What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Maybin & Stierer, 1994, p. 54). Ms. Baker acknowledged her K-2 students prior experience and knowledge concerning artistic tools and mediums, and then she proceeded to build upon her student's prior experience and understanding through demonstration and assistance. In addition, Ms. Baker encouraged students to practice and experiment with the artistic tools and mediums to promote growth and understanding.

However, the way in which Ms. Baker taught students how to first use the artistic tools and mediums before students got a chance to actually create artwork and experiment with those materials is a traditional method because information was being disseminated to students (Brooks & Brooks, 1996, p. 17). Instead, Ms. Baker could have employed an aspect of constructivism and encouraged students to problem solve and develop their own knowledge of how to use the materials on their own, by first letting students experiment and explore their possibilities while creating their artwork. Essentially, the students could have executed their artwork and learned the artistic tools and mediums at the same time.

As Ms. Baker described above, she found that in the past when she did not provide a thorough demonstration of how to use artistic tools or materials, her kindergarten through second grade students had not responded positively. Ms. Baker discovered that the student's frustrations increased and their confidences decreased, when they weren't able to successfully execute the imagery they desired in their artwork, because of their lack of knowledge and experience with the artistic tools and mediums supplied to them. In conjunction with this reason, Ms. Baker believed that students felt a sense of accomplishment when they gained control over the artistic tools and mediums and were able to draw, paint, and construct the imagery they anticipated.

An example of two students expressing accomplishment and pride in gaining control over their artistic tools and mediums occurred in the second grade class. In this unit, among other units in kindergarten and first grade, Ms. Baker constructed meaningful relationships and metaphors about how to use the artistic tools and mediums that were easily relatable and memorable for students. In this unit (Appendix M), while demonstrating how to paint with watercolors Ms. Baker explained tenderly,

So, if you touch the tip of your brush—The tip of your brush—The toe of the ballerina in the water, and then when you paint—You just paint with the toe of your ballerina. Don't flatten her foot and break it!

Three days after Ms. Baker's demonstration with watercolors in this unit, students began to utilize her comparisons while painting with their watercolors tactfully. At one point in class, Michael confidently reminded his classmates, "And also if you have a paintbrush and you push down—You break the ballerina's foot." In addition to Michael, when I asked Jonathan what he had learned he replied proudly, "I learned not to break the boundaries [of the coloring book page lines] and not to break the ballerinas foot." Students like Michael and Jonathan, felt like they now controlled the watercolor paint and that it didn't have control over the imagery they could create.

Another example of a student displaying a sense of triumph while utilizing his artistic tools and mediums in the appropriate manner happened in the first grade unit (Appendix K). In kindergarten through second grade, Ms. Baker also spent a great deal of time observing her students throughout the unit, providing on-one-on or hand-over-hand instruction of how to use artistic tools and mediums when students needed it. Billy a student in the first grade class, had begun to paint the sky in his seascape, but he was roughly scrubbing his paintbrush against the surface of his paper. Ms. Baker noticed that Billy was unaware of how to pull the paint gently across his paper and made the decision to help him by utilizing hand-over-hand instruction. Ms. Baker showed Billy how to softly pull his brush across his white paper while saying soothingly, "*Pull* the paint across, you *pull* the paint across." Having working with Billy, Ms. Baker left to go help students at another table. Billy continued to paint on his own, announcing to himself

excitedly, “*Pull the paint across, pull the paint across.*” Billy’s brushstrokes went to the sound and arrangement of those therapeutic words. “Look I’m doing it!” Billy then shouted out proudly. Ms. Baker’s devotion to providing students with hand-over-hand and one-on-one demonstrations of how to use artistic tools and mediums, resulted in students like Billy, feeling a sense of empowerment while in the process of creating their artwork. Ms. Baker’s forms of instruction and assistance with Billy connected to Vygotsky’s (1930) findings on students being able to reach their full potential when given the opportunity to interact with a more knowledgeable other in the classroom, which is a key aspect of constructivism (Maybin & Stierer, 1994, p. 57).

The second strategy Ms. Baker employed alongside teaching students how to have control over their artistic tools and mediums, was breaking up the artistic process into steps for her kindergarten through second grade students. Ms. Baker would visually and verbally explain what steps students would be taking in the construction of their artwork per grade level, per unit. For example in a first grade unit (Appendix K), on the first day Ms. Baker had students divide their paper for their seascape into three different sections to help them be able to visually see where the sky, ocean, and beach would go in their paintings. After students had drawn their lines, Ms. Baker had students paint in their sky on the top portion of their paper. On the following day, students were instructed to paint their ocean and their beach in the bottom two sections left on their paper. If students made alterations to Ms. Baker’s steps in their artwork, she would fully support their creative decisions. Ms. Baker explained how the breaking down of the artistic process into steps, served as flexible guidelines for students to follow,

I usually try to give them some guidance because it's just going to be a mess, but once in a while you know, they make their own decisions and I let them go with it. I try not to be too corrective, to the point where it stifles the creative ideas that they want to use. We all sort of wind up in the same place, but with everybody's being their own.

Ms. Baker described at the end of a unit, how student's artwork appeared to contain some similar characteristics as a result of her breaking the artistic process into steps. On the other hand, Ms. Baker also found that even though student's wound up at the same place, each student's artwork still exposed imagery that was representative of who they were individually; this connects to the project-based learning approach. In a project-based learning approach as defined by Diffily and Sassman (2002), students explored a topic of interest that they investigated together, after collecting data students decided how to display what they learned, which resulted in everyone's end products slightly resembling one another's (p. 13). Ms. Baker further clarified her reasoning behind breaking down the artistic process into steps for her kindergarten through second grade students in an interview. I asked Ms. Baker if she found that she got more imaginative results when she didn't provide students with steps. Ms. Baker replied,

It depends on the grade level. Sometimes, they don't know what to do if they don't have an example of it. And then, sometimes they do get more imaginative, but more often then not they don't know what to do because they've had so little experience with hands on materials. They have so little chance to do this at home and in the classrooms that a lot of the times, they don't know what to do with it, if they don't have something (at home). I've had lesson plans totally fall apart

because they had no clue. You know? If they didn't have some sort of example or idea there to look at, to tell them what to do.

Following this I stated, "Because they are looking for your.... What you want them to do essentially." Ms. Baker retorted,

Exactly. It's this whole thing you know, they get to kindergarten and even though the kindergarten teachers would love to just let them make and do, they tend to sit, they tend to group them. They're with the teacher and they are doing a math lesson that has art, but they're all making exactly the same thing, and it's got to be exactly this way, they've got to put exactly this. You know? They can choose how many, whatever number they want to put on of something, but they're all putting buttons on it, and it all looks the same. You know? Line them up in the hall and they are all the same. Then by the time they get to us, it's kind of hard to turn it around.

Ms. Baker described how kindergarten through second grade students struggled to create artwork without her providing them with steps or a reference to replicate. The students response in the art classroom, led Ms. Baker to believe that numerous general education teachers at Central Bellville Elementary School and Ridgeview Elementary School led more of a traditional classroom environment. As Marlowe and Page (1998) described,

If a student repeats information, as often happens in a traditional class; it doesn't mean she understands anything or can apply this information in any way; it doesn't demonstrate learning or understanding—it simply demonstrates the ability to repeat information (p. 12).



In this aspect, because several of Ms. Baker's students in kindergarten through second grade were used to what Marlowe and Page described as regurgitation of a product in the classroom (p. 11), Ms. Baker decided that she had to implement a strategy that would basically serve as a gateway into constructivism, in order to get students to become more confident with creating and developing their own artwork. In this case, the strategy Ms. Baker utilized for her K-2 students was breaking down the artistic process into steps, before providing them with an option of artistic freedom and choice in their artwork. The steps Ms. Baker provided her students with helped to structure their artwork; she started with the background, and then moved to the middle ground, and lastly she transitioned to the foreground. Ms. Baker found that breaking down the artistic process into steps for students, ultimately gave them a foundation to build off their own ideas in their artwork. Even though Ms. Baker's steps provided students with some sort of base in their artwork, I found that Ms. Baker could have utilized a more effective constructivist approach to produce a similar foundation. A guiding principle of constructivist teaching according to Brooks and Brooks (1996), is posing problems of emerging relevance in the classroom (p. 44). Brooks and Brooks expressed,

Constructivist teachers seek to ask one big question, to give the students time to think about it, and to lead them to the resources to answer it. This is quite different from asking the many specific questions that spring from the prescribed syllabus, and, when the questions are not quickly or accurately answered, answering for the students to keep the pace of the lesson brisk (p. 39).

In relationship to what Brooks and Brooks stated, I discovered that a part of the reason why Ms. Baker broke down the artistic process into steps for students, was an attempt to

keep the pace of the lesson fast due to the time constraints, in addition to the amount of concepts and standards she was expected to cover within her curriculum. Instead, Ms. Baker could have provided numerous visuals for students to study and analyze in relationship to the concept they were discussing in class. Following this Ms. Baker may have asked students how they planned on creating their own artwork. What would they start painting or drawing first in their artwork and why? What would they paint after that subject matter? Students could have developed their own foundations in their artwork through experimentation and analyzing visual resources provided to them. Ms. Baker could have given her students a more active role in their learning. I believe that incorporating this constructivist aspect could have resulted in a more positive and meaningful experience for Ms. Baker's K-2 students, because the students would have felt in charge of developing their artwork.

Through observational field notes and interviews, I found that the artistic knowledge and skills, passed on to students through Ms. Baker's instruction and demonstrations, ultimately led to students feeling empowered and confident in executing their own ideas and imagery in their artwork. As mentioned earlier, I observed students reveal a sense of empowerment when they felt they gained mastery over their artistic tools and mediums during their artistic process. Several students exposed emotions characteristic of pride and accomplishment, and a few students enthusiastically discussed with me how they had gained control over the artistic tools and mediums, by using phrases Ms. Baker had recently employed during her demonstrations. I found that only one or two students still struggled with executing imagery in their artwork after Ms. Baker's thorough instructions and demonstrations with artistic tools and mediums.

Additionally, Ms. Baker had expressed that the reason why she broke down the artistic process into steps, was to help her K-2 students to have a foundation from which to build their artwork. However, I discovered that Ms. Baker's K-2 students would have been able to develop a foundation in their artwork on their own, if Ms. Baker had employed the constructivist aspect of posing problems of emerging relevance in the art classroom. If Ms. Baker had implemented this constructivist aspect, it would have encouraged students to experiment, explore, and learn how to develop their artwork on their own from beginning to end. This in turn, would have resulted in students feeling more ownership over their artwork. Furthermore, I found that Ms. Baker attempted to balance out the steps she incorporated, by providing K-2 students with a third strategy. The third strategy Ms. Baker employed was providing students with opportunities of artistic freedom and choice in their artwork, which is discussed in the following segment.

**Providing Students with Artistic Freedom and Choice.** As described briefly in the prior section, Ms. Baker believed that artistic freedom and choice was not something her kindergarten through second grade students were used to having in their elementary classroom or at home. Providing her kindergarten through second grade students with artistic freedom and choice in the art classroom was something Ms. Baker gradually had to build within units. In analyzing my observational field notes and student artwork, I discovered that when Ms. Baker provided kindergarten through second grade students with artistic freedom and choice in their artistic process, it resulted in students feeling empowered in the art classroom, as well as students feeling a sense of ownership over their artwork. The empowerment and ownership that was felt by students was then expressed through stories executed by the imagery in their artwork. The following

subcategories are significant excerpts out of observational notes, observer comments, and audio recordings per grade level, that display examples of Ms. Baker's instruction, in addition to students verbal and visual reactions to artistic freedom and choice.

***Kindergarten.*** Occasionally during kindergarten units, I found Ms. Baker would incorporate aspects of project-based learning at particular centers. In a unit titled, *Mondrian's Lines, Shapes, and Colors*, (Appendix E), Ms. Baker provided students with two examples of imagery they could create out of geometric shapes on the board; she constructed a robot and a house. In the following unit titled, *Fall Color Centers* (Appendix G), Ms. Baker chose not to provide examples for students, for instance Ms. Baker stated, "We still have our collage center, where you glue the shapes down." I observed Patrice creating artwork (Appendix H) at the collage center; I examined her artistic response to Ms. Baker's vague instructions.

I asked Patrice in a curious voice, "What are you making over here?" Patrice tilted her head and responded, "Um...a house." Patrice then pointed to a yellow square near the top of her white paper that had a yellow rectangle on the top right of it, with a blue square carefully positioned in the middle of the yellow rectangle. "And this is a pool," Patrice explained to me while pointing to a yellow square positioned to the right side of the house; on top of the yellow square there were four blue squares. "This is fantastic," I said enthusiastically to Patrice. Patrice smiled at me like the Cheshire cat in "Alice and Wonderland," as she added another piece of yellow paper to the top right of her house, on top of her blue triangle. "Now I'm done," Patrice exclaimed. "What did you add?" I asked Patrice happily. Patrice explained the story told through her artwork

ecstatically, “If a wolf came in my house—his tail is gunna get burnt!” Patrice laughed heartily after she said this to me. I chuckled too and said, “Oh no! That poor wolf!”

From observer comments in my field notes I quote the following: Patrice could not recall the word she was looking for, which was the word chimney. Patrice added a chimney to her house and her way to explain to me that it was in fact a chimney, was through making a connection to a story she had heard. Patrice made a personal and meaningful connection to her artwork by relating it to something that she had experienced. Patrice took ownership of her artwork and was thrilled to talk with me about it. I found that while students constructed meaningful imagery at the collage tables out of geometric shapes, they were problem solving, albeit at a lower level. Students were thinking of an image in their minds and then figuring out a way to create that image out of the shapes, and on top of their white paper. Walker (2001) explained, “With open-ended artmaking problems, students must search for solutions during the artmaking process and/or after the work is completed”, at their level of ability (p. 135). A principle of constructivism is providing students with the open-ended problems as Walker (2001) discussed, where students like Patrice in Ms. Baker’s art classroom, are asked to experiment, explore, analyze, and document their learning experiences through their artwork.

Upon my conversation with Patrice about her collage, David another student at the collage center excitedly called for my attention. David exclaimed in amazement to me, “Look what I did! I made a super-duper airplane!” (Appendix H). The following quote is one of my observer comments from my field notes: Students are taking pride in what they are creating in the art classroom and they are excited to share their artwork

with their teachers and classmates. When discussing a student's experience in a constructivist classroom Walker (2001) explained, "His artmaking is personally satisfying because he has discovered a way to employ his personal interest in a meaningful manner" (p. 22). Ms. Baker encouraged kindergarten students at the collage center to make imagery of their choice out of the construction paper shapes, which resulted in students like David, bringing in their interests and creating a piece of meaningful artwork that they could take ownership of and see as an accomplishment.

In addition to the collage center, Ms. Baker also gave choice-based instructions for the drawing center, "I want you to continue practicing your shapes and making pictures with your shapes." As a result of these instructions that provided room for artistic freedom and choice, I found that students at the drawing center expressed their own ideas, interests, and experiences. Christopher excitedly asked me to come over to the drawing center as he announced cheerfully, "I'm drawing a picture of a dinosaur (Appendix H)!" I then asked Christopher if they were learning about dinosaurs in class and he informed me briefly that they were. From observer comments in my field notes I quote the following: Today I found that the drawing center in the kindergarten art classroom asked students to express their own interests and ideas through drawing. I discovered that students like Christopher, were able to incorporate their prior knowledge and experiences, and reflect on them with other classmates. Simpson (1996), described an aspect of constructivism, "Teaching children the meaning of art and artists is making connections and linking ideas about art to their personal world and often, to other academic subjects through verbal and visual expression" (p.54). In this situation because of Ms. Baker's choice-based instruction at the beginning of class, Christopher was able to

connect to his new interest in dinosaurs that had developed in his general education classroom. Furthermore, Christopher was able to document his examination of dinosaurs through his artwork in Ms. Baker's art classroom.

After talking to Christopher, I asked Riley at the drawing center, "Tell me about what you're drawing over here; this is fabulous." Riley who was very invested in his drawing (Appendix H) said quickly and quietly, "A car." At the end of class Riley approached me with his finished drawing beaming with pride. Riley pointed to the imagery at the top of his drawing and explained to me happily, "It's raining." I cite the following from observer comments in my field notes: I wondered if Riley had included the rain clouds in his drawing, because of the rain clouds that were outside today. If this was true, students like Riley, were making a connection from what they were seeing and experiencing in the outside world and bringing it into their artwork. Unfortunately, I never got the chance to talk to Riley more in depth about the imagery in his artwork. Nevertheless, Riley exhibited a sense of satisfaction over the imagery in his artwork because it was a reflection of his interests and experience.

In this kindergarten unit, Ms. Baker employed aspects of the project-based learning approach, which incorporates constructivism. Ms. Baker's instructions for the collage center and the drawing center, encouraged students to develop a personal connection with their artwork. Kindergarten students who chose those centers, were asked to explore a topic of their interest, experiment, and figure out a way to execute their ideas, which is representative of the project-based approach (Diffily and Sassman, 2002, p. 7). However at the same time, I found that Ms. Baker was also providing her students with traditional learning experiences. Ms. Baker only gave her kindergarten students 20

minutes to create their artwork, they did not get to add on or explore their topic over a long stretch of time. In this aspect, I discovered that students were not able to build upon their prior experiences and understanding of the topic that they decided to examine. As Diffily and Sassman discussed in relationship to the project-based approach, “Whether children are trying to find answers to their questions about a topic or creating an end product to demonstrate what they have learned, applied learning teachers encourage research—and explicitly teach children how to conduct that research” (p. 7). I found that Ms. Baker could have spent more time showing students different resources, in relationship to the topics of their interests, to help students gain new understanding and knowledge.

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade.* Throughout my first grade observations, I found that Ms. Baker asked students to brainstorm and share ideas of imagery that they could incorporate in their artwork, in relationship to the concept being learned. For example at the beginning of the seascape unit (Appendix K), Ms. Baker asked students to share ideas about what imagery they could paint in their seascapes. Students’ answers ranged from people in bathing suits to seahorses in the ocean. Brainstorming is an aspect of project-based lessons, as Kolbe (2001) explained,

As children listen to each other’s ideas and see each other’s work, they have opportunities to learn that there are different points of view. Through exploring a topic in different ways and from different perspectives, they expand their understandings (p. 111).

In this situation, Ms. Baker gave her first grade students the opportunity to share experiences and perceptions of what objects or things could be found in a seascape or on



a beach; this offered students new perspectives and ideas that they may not have thought of originally. In addition, Ms. Baker took on the role of a constructivist teacher through asking and encouraging students to share their ideas, experiences, and perceptions. This revealed how Ms. Baker sought and valued her students' points of view in the art classroom (Brooks & Brooks, 1996, p. ix).

Two days later at the end of the seascape unit, Ms. Baker asked students to incorporate the imagery that they had brainstormed on the first day. Ms. Baker explained to students, "Remember today, you're going to paint the details on your seascape. Remember we talked about things you can put in a seascape, a palm tree, or a boat, or people on the beach. OK? This is *your* choice of what to put in your seascape." In this instance, Ms. Baker gave students a few suggestions of what they could add imagery-wise to their artwork; she did this to assist students in recalling some of the ideas they had initially discussed. I found that Ms. Baker could have incorporated a principle of constructivism in this circumstance, instead of mentioning what ideas and thoughts the students had shared two weeks ago. Ms. Baker could have posed a problem to students that required them share their point of view again. Ms. Baker could have asked the students, "What are we missing in our seascapes? We have the ocean, the sand, and the sky, what else could we add to our seascapes? Remember the first day of this unit when we talked about what other things are in a seascape?" I discovered that a part of the reason why Ms. Baker did not ask problems of emerging relevance was to keep the pace of the unit brisk, as pointed out earlier. Ms. Baker felt pressured to teach a concept within a short amount of time because of how much she was expected to cover in the curriculum. Additionally, I found that Ms. Baker wanted to give students as much time as

she could allow for them to create their artwork. Although Ms. Baker did not decide to incorporate problems of emerging relevance at the end of the seascape unit, I observed how she encouraged and supported students in making their own decisions about what imagery they would paint in their seascapes. Ms. Baker exhibited a quality of a constructivist teacher, she was sensitive to what her first grade students knew from experience and she valued the experiences they decided to illustrate in their artwork (Simpson, 1996, p. 57).

As a result of Ms. Baker's instructions providing artistic freedom and choice in this seascape unit, students excitedly and immediately engaged in their artistic process. Students eagerly discussed and exchanged ideas of what they would be adding in their seascapes next; Jose said joyfully to Maia, "I'm going to add coconuts!" While Jonathan explained enthusiastically to me, while pointing to a red brushstroke in his seascape (Appendix L), "This is a shark in the ocean!" Following this, Jonathan excitedly pointed to a blue shape in his water and said happily, "This is me in the ocean—surfing!" I discovered that the value and support Ms. Baker expressed for her student's to document their experiences and active imaginations in their seascape artwork, led to a range of interpretations in the imagery student's painted, in addition to open-ended discussions happening in the art classroom. As Simpson (1996) stated, varying interpretations of a concept and open-ended discussions, "all lend themselves toward helping students accept their ideas as valid" (p. 58).

Halfway through class, students started to get out of their seats to tell Ms. Baker, their classmates, and me elaborate and imaginative stories of what was happening in their seascape. Andrew exclaimed to me ecstatically pointing to his painting (Appendix L),

“That’s a shark! It ate a lot of people that’s why there is so much blood everywhere.”

Andrew then explained in more depth, “That’s me in the car—my cousin is in the car too—even my baby brother. There’s smoke because I’m trying to save a person from the shark—and it’s shooting at the shark.”

Kevin another student at Andrew’s table, proceeded to grab my attention pointing at his painting (Appendix L) and saying ecstatically, “A shark came up onto land! Then the octopus came up. Then the shark ate some people!” Kevin then eagerly touched a green brush stroke in his painting, “The turtle was swimming and a shark ate him!” Kevin took his index finger off the green stroke in his painting and pointed to a human figure, “That’s me.” I replied curiously, “What are you doing?” Kevin answered with a huge grin, “I’m screaming no!” I asked returning a smile, “Well why are you screaming no?” Kevin let out a big giggle and exclaimed, “Because the shark is about to eat me!” Kevin and Andrew’s artwork varied in appearance and subject matter, however Kevin’s story about his artwork shared a few characteristics with Andrew’s story. I discovered that Kevin and Andrew interacting and exchanging stories with each other, had an impact on what imagery they decided to incorporate in their seascapes. Wilson and Wilson (1977) discussed how they found that children were often inspired by their peers and family members artwork; they believed that this is where children were taught how to draw and what to draw. I found that because Ms. Baker did not discourage students from interacting while they created their artwork, it led students like Andrew and Kevin to exchanging and exploring ideas, and developing artwork that was devoted to an interest they shared.

At the end of class, Ms. Baker had students sit in rows on the blue carpet in front of the Smart Board. She gave the students a hand-held microphone and one by one the students would stand up with the microphone say one piece of imagery they painted in their seascape, and then preceded to pass the microphone to the classmate next to them. Students clapped and cheered at their classmate's idea, the students loved being able to share their ideas and artwork with their classmates and teachers. Kolbe (2001) explained the significance behind students verbally and visually sharing their ideas and artwork with their classmates,

As children listen to each other's ideas and see each other's work, they have opportunities to learn that there are different points of view. Through exploring a topic in different ways and from different perspectives, they expand their understandings (p. 111).

The following quotations expose the range in student's ideas and artwork with the implementation of freedom and artistic choice in this unit:

- Sean: "I painted boats, I paint sharks, I paint fishes."
- Phil: "I painted people swimming."
- Andrew: "I painted monster trucks."
- Natalie: "I put fish."
- Jayla: "I put...electric eels and fish, and an octopus, and a shark (Appendix L)."
- Kenny: "I put a man giving out icees."
- Natalie: "I put orange seashells."
- Sarah: "I put a seagull."
- Jake: "I put NFL in footsteps (Appendix L)."

- Emily: “I put a butterfly (Appendix L).”

At the end of this unit, I found that the background of student’s seascapes varied slightly because of the artistic process being broken up into steps, as well as the objective being taught and learned. However, the choice-based portion of this unit, in addition to the opportunities for students to interact and share ideas, experiences, and interests led to a vast range of imagery in student artwork.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Grade.** Ms. Baker separated her second grade Caldecott Watercolor Unit (Appendix M) into two different art projects, Part I and Part II. I found that Part II of the Caldecott Watercolor Unit encouraged and required students to include their own experiences, interests, and perceptions into their artwork. Ms. Baker began Part II of the Caldecott Watercolor Unit by discussing what fairytales were: “Usually something magical happens that can never happen in real life. And you can use a fairytale that you know or that you’ve heard, or you can make up your own fairytale. But when you do your picture...” Ms. Baker then provided the second grade students with a demonstration and teacher’s sample of a scene from her favorite fairytale, “Sleeping Beauty,” to give them a starting point. As soon as students started their artwork, they were eagerly sharing ideas with classmates at their table about what they were going to draw in their fairytale. Nick told Adam excitedly, “Remember in Shrek—I’m going to draw the boy with the long nose! The wizard is going to cast a spell on him and turn him into a boy (Appendix O)!” Zoe explained to Kayla, “The Little Mermaid is going to go up to a ship and then she is going to rescue a boy—a prince (Appendix O)! That’s what I’m going to draw from that part of the movie.”

The following class, more creative storytelling began to surface among the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students as they began watercolor painting their artwork. The quotations below show some of the stories students enthusiastically explained to me about their artwork.

- *Sonny* (Appendix O): “That’s Mario and Luigi. They’re in a castle trying to save Princess Peach!”
- *Laura* (Appendix O): “There was a Little Mermaid and she was swimming around and then she saw two little fishes. And then, she saw them swimming and then, there was a red jellyfish! And then, the jellyfish was about to sink them. Then the jellyfish did not get to sink them, because it was too strong. And then, there was a bird on the rock and then the bird was flying around saying get out of the way!”
- *Phoenix* (Appendix O): “Mine is just Shrek. Shrek comes up to the house and rescues Princess Fiona and then he goes to the bed, and gives Fiona a kiss to wake her up. And then, when he kisses her and she wakes up she says, “Let’s get out of here!” And this is Shrek right here and then I drew another Shrek, because he’s walking over to Princess Fiona.”
- *Jacob* (Appendix O): “There’s a girl in the window. A king just got her and put her in the castle—but she went out to find someone she likes.”

I found Phoenix’s artwork and statement to be especially interesting. Phoenix had discussed how she was painting a scene from her favorite movie, Shrek. Phoenix explained how she painted two Shrek’s in her artwork, as a way to express that Shrek was moving. I discovered that while Phoenix was in the process of creating her artwork, she had problem solved and used critical thinking skills to find her own solution for creating movement and a sense of time passing, on a two-dimensional surface. Constructivism

according to Pritchard and Woollard (2010) is about students constructing their own knowledge by being actively involved in the learning process (p. 48).

In conclusion, my findings stated that Ms. Baker's three strategies of, providing K-2 students with artistic knowledge, skills, and steps, as well as giving them artistic freedom and choice, were employed to develop a student's sense of empowerment in the art classroom. Through examination of observational field notes and audio recordings, I found that as a part of building up students' confidence to create imagery freely from their imagination and interests, Ms. Baker found it necessary to provide students with a foundation point in their artwork by discussing ideas for imagery prior to creating. The ideas Ms. Baker mentioned, only served as suggestions to the students who were struggling in coming up with or deciding on imagery to depict in their artwork. I discovered that when Ms. Baker incorporated a foundation in ideas, in addition to freedom and choice in a unit, it resulted in K-2 students feeling a sense of ownership over their artwork. I found that the artistic freedom and choice granted students with the opportunity to create personally relevant artwork. Whether students incorporated imagery that was related to their interests, perception, or experience, they found their artwork to be challenging and to have a purpose. In this aspect, artistic freedom and choice in the art classroom yielded students having a voice within their artwork. Moreover, as described in the subcategories above, the aspects of constructivism Ms. Baker utilized resulted in students being self-motivated and engaged while in the process of creating their artwork. The way, in which students enthusiastically approached their classmates and teachers with confidence in their ideas and artwork exposed their feelings of accomplishment and

value. Furthermore, this ultimately showed that students felt that their ideas, perceptions, experiences, and artwork were valuable.

### **Teacher Limitations and Student Responses**

As discussed by Marlowe and Page (1998), a core element of a teacher implementing aspects of constructivism, was providing students with the opportunities to learn and develop knowledge on their own, through challenging new ideas and concepts, experimentation, problem solving, analysis, and exchanging of ideas (p. 10).

Additionally, Marlowe and Page expressed that what students bring to how and what they learn is essential and should be utilized by a teacher in order to engage, motivate, and further develop student's ideas and understanding (p.10). In the section prior to this, I described how Ms. Baker provided kindergarten through second grade students with opportunities of artistic freedom and choice in their artwork, which helped to engage and empower students in the art classroom. However, I found on a few occasions that Ms. Baker's units became more about the concept being taught or about students gaining mastery over artistic tools and materials, and less about student artistic freedom and choice in the making of their artwork. When Ms. Baker instructed her units in this manner, I discovered that students did not feel that their ideas or experiences mattered, and that they struggled in connecting meaningfully to the artwork that they had little to no input in developing and creating, which resulted in the disengagement of students in the art classroom. Below I explain how disengagement in the art classroom could be seen in students change in behavior and attitude toward their artwork.

An example of disengagement in Ms. Baker's kindergarten art classroom happened at the very beginning of the year. In this unit (Appendix E), Ms. Baker was



focused on teaching students the routines and procedures at the painting center, in addition to teaching them how to utilize paintbrushes and paint. While Ms. Baker and a teaching assistant taught four students at a time at the painting center, the rest of the kindergarten class received a coloring book page displaying one of Mondrian's paintings. Ms. Baker instructed that students could use whatever crayon colors they wanted and then once they finished, they were told to draw on the back. I witnessed several students hurriedly scribble to fill in their coloring book page and then eagerly flip to the blank surface on the other side. A few students even flipped their coloring book pages over immediately after they had received them, so they could draw an image of their choice on the back. As explained, Ms. Baker limited students artistically on the coloring book side of the paper, where students were required to color in an image that was not of their choice or interest. However on the blank side of the paper, Ms. Baker had provided students with artistic freedom and choice, where students were encouraged to develop personally relevant imagery. I found that the level of engagement and disengagement of student's was exposed in the back and front of their artwork (Appendix F).

In a first grade unit (Appendix L), Ms. Baker provided students with printed off imagery of two barns and two houses (one small and one large). Ms. Baker instructed students to color in their background for their landscapes and then to color in the images of the barns and houses afterwards. Preceding these tasks, Ms. Baker asked students to cut out their barns and houses and glue them to their landscapes. Ms. Baker put emphasis on where students' barns and houses needed to be placed on their landscapes to get across the concept of depth on a 2-D surface. However, I found that these specific guidelines and limitations in order to get across the concept of depth on a 2-D surface, resulted

again, in the disengagement of students. I found that most students tried to create their artwork as fast as they could. The student's lack of interest was depicted in the vivid strokes of colored pencil forming their background, in addition to the barns and houses that a few students haphazardly attached. I discovered that several students disengaged from their artwork at this point in time, judging by the amount of effort they were putting into their artwork. When most students had already lost interest in their artwork, Ms. Baker finally provided the only opportunity for artistic freedom and choice. Ms. Baker told students that once they finished their backgrounds and added their houses that they could draw and cut out other imagery of their choice. Very few students decided to add additional imagery to their artwork (Appendix J).

During a second grade unit (Appendix M), students were learning how to use watercolors effectively. In order to help students learn how to gain control over their watercolor brush and paint, Ms. Baker decided to provide students with two different coloring book images of swans to color in. The first day of this activity, I observed that students were just excited to have the opportunity to paint. I found that they also painted the swan template very gently and judiciously with the watercolor paints. I also saw that the vast majority of students painted very slowly, trying to make sure that the watercolor paint did not go over the lines creating the images. Some students even took the time to use pieces of paper towel to blot at the watercolor paint, so that it would not expand over the lines. The following class, students continued painting the same swan template. I witnessed students slowly become disengaged from their paintings. Students who spent time, realistically, coloring in their swan template like Jose and Erin, had started to take more risks in the colors they used, veering away from realism (Appendix N). In addition,

I discovered that students like Kara and Chelsea, who previously spent their time meticulously painting every detail, had begun to cover entire areas of their painting in one block of color (Appendix N). I discovered that even though this unit helped students gain control and confidence in utilizing watercolors, students became disinterested in its content, seemingly because the coloring book pages, did not give students a voice in their artwork, which resulted in the expressions of frustration shown in the process of painting their artwork.

In the examination of my observational field notes and student artwork, I recognized areas in units where Ms. Baker presented students with limitations in their artwork. In response to the limitations in imagery, I noticed students' attempt to break free, which is also known as disengaging. In comparison to the last section on the positive responses of students to artistic freedom and choice in the kindergarten through second grade art classes, I discovered that not providing students with artistic freedom had the opposite effect on students. I found that during the units mentioned, students did not: enthusiastically discuss their artwork, find their artwork to be personally relevant, take ownership over the imagery in their artwork, take pride in their artwork, nor enjoy creating their artwork. In summary, the analysis of my data verified what Marlowe and Page (1998) had stated about general education classrooms: In order for a student to become engaged and self-motivated in an art classroom, the teacher needs to provide challenges and opportunities for students to incorporate their ideas, perceptions, and experiences.

## **Conclusion**

During this study of searching for what aspects of constructivism could be found in a K-2 art classroom, I discovered that students felt in control and valued in the art classroom when they were presented with challenges, as well as granted the opportunity to make their own decisions and explorations in their artwork. However, I found that students within this age group needed support and encouragement in the development of their artistic skills, knowledge, and ideas before being provided this power. As Walker (2001) expressed, “Even when artmaking is spontaneous, specific objectives are necessary. Too much freedom can be as inhibiting as too many restrictions” (p. 31). Through analyzing interviews and observational field notes, I also came to terms with some of the challenges that could factor into how many constructivist aspects an art teacher might be able to successfully employ in their K-2 art classroom. In Chapter V, I reflect on the findings of this study and the knowledge I gained, additionally I provide recommendations for further research and implications for the field of art education

## **Chapter V: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

When I began this study, I was on a personal quest to find out what it looked like when constructivist aspects were implemented effectively in a K-2 art classroom and how they proved to be beneficial to students by analyzing student's verbal and visual responses. Reflecting on my research now, I may not have seen the amount of constructivist aspects that I wanted to see implemented in a early elementary art classroom, however I discovered that having this experience revealed that there is a dire need for further research in the field of art education in relationship to constructivism. In culmination, I found this study displayed the balancing act that takes place in a kindergarten through second grade art classroom between structure and freedom, and exposed the underlying challenge in implementing aspects of constructivism in the art classroom.

### **The Balancing Act of Structure and Freedom**

As Thompson (1995) stated, "Freedom to learn and grow does not occur in the absence of structure." In the analysis of my research, I found that K-2 students needed a sense of structure in their artwork and in the art classroom, but not enough structure that would result in constricting student ideas and artwork. In this aspect, providing students with artistic freedom and choice in this age group, proved to be a balancing act. I discovered that if too much artistic freedom and choice was supplied to K-2 students', some did not know where to start in their artwork, nor did students have confidence executing their ideas.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, I found that if students were without the option of artistic freedom and choice in their artwork, it led to student disengagement. This was because the students' points of view were not valued and as a result, the students did not find their artwork to be personally relevant or meaningful. Likewise, I discovered Ms. Baker's K-2 students were also deprived of having a voice or opinion in the classroom and in their artwork, because of time constraints and teacher choice. Additionally, I found that students gained empowerment in the art classroom when they had developed a partnership in the creation of their artwork with their teacher. A key tenet of constructivism is the partnership that is established between the teacher and his or her students in the classroom, this partnership gives teachers and their students equal ownership over the classroom (DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 59). In this partnership, the teacher initially provided students with engaging and personally relevant blueprints for their artwork. The students were then encouraged and supported by the teacher if they decided to make their own alterations to the blueprints. Overall, I learned that art teachers first have to find that balance between structure and liberty in the art classroom.

### **The Underlying Challenge**

Throughout my research, I became fully aware of the numerous challenges that elementary art teachers might face on a daily basis. Ms. Baker confronted various obstacles art teachers could face at some point during their career, including the obstacles of time and scheduling constraints, teaching multiple grade levels, an inadequate art classroom budget, and the state standards. As a result of these challenges, Ms. Baker found it difficult to incorporate as many constructivist aspects as she wanted to. However, I believe that even though we as elementary art teachers face several strenuous

restrictions, it is still possible to implement aspects of constructivism in our classrooms. This is why I believe my bias as an art teacher and a comrade, kept me from recognizing Ms. Baker's underlying challenges in implementing constructivism in her K-2 classroom. Initially I thought that she lacked knowledge of constructivist aspects, and did not know how to implement them into her art classroom and schedule.

In witnessing another art teacher's struggles in being able to implement constructivist aspects into her K-2 class effectively, I realized what Brooks and Brooks (1996) had stated originally for general education teachers could also be said for art teachers. According to Brooks and Brooks, "Unless teachers are given ample opportunities to learn in constructivist settings and construct for themselves educational visions through which they can reflect on educational practices, the instructional programs they learn will be trivialized into "cook-book" procedures" (p. 121). In relationship to Brooks and Brooks' observation, perhaps with more observational opportunities to observe and examine model programs of constructivism, art teachers would be able to implement constructivist aspects into their classrooms.

### **Implications for the Field of Art Education**

In the process of conducting my research, in addition to the examination of my findings, I discovered that other art teachers have difficulty implementing aspects of constructivism. As described earlier, the participant I observed in this study lacked knowledge about the educational philosophy of constructivism. Additionally at the beginning of this study, I struggled to locate an art teacher. Multiple art teachers that I contacted either did not claim to be a constructivist teacher or explained how they were only vaguely familiar with the term constructivism. Art teachers may have difficulty

implementing aspects of constructivism in their classrooms because of the lack of knowledge of theory and modeling available to them; more resources need to be available to art teachers in terms of constructivist practices. In addition, this also means that there need to be more opportunities provided to teachers where they can actively observe and examine effective constructivist classrooms.

As explained in Chapter II, I found several examples of general education teachers utilizing constructivist aspects in their classrooms. Yet this research has made it clear to me that the field of art education needs further study and exploration on this topic in order to produce more concrete examples, tools, and modeling to assist art teachers, so that they are better able to implement constructivist aspects into their art classroom.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The data I have gathered in this study comes from a single art teacher and one class of her kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms. A more in depth study could explore how art teachers across grade levels effectively implement constructivist aspects into their lesson plans and curriculum. Further research might examine the constructivist aspects that are being implemented in general education classrooms and how that information might be successfully translated over into art education practices.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of conducting this study, I gained a better understanding of constructivism. This study explored how one art teacher sought to employ aspects of constructivism in her kindergarten, first, and second grade classes. In summary, I discovered that art teachers need to achieve a sense of balance between structure and artistic freedom in their K-2 classrooms, in order for students to have a beneficial and



meaningful learning experience. Students are provided with a meaningful learning experience in a constructivist art classroom, when they play an active role in their learning process, as well as when they are able to pursue and share their ideas, experiences, and interests in their artwork (Marlowe & Page, 1998, p. 10). Marlowe and Page (1998) stated,

Although constructivists differ on details of the concept of learning, all propose that when students conduct their own interpretations, their learning is deeper, more comprehensive, and longer lasting, and the learning that occurs actively leads to an ability to think critically (p. 12).

Additionally, I found that a part of the balance in the classroom is about the partnership developed between an art teacher and their students, as well as the flexibility within the curriculum. Simpson (1996), explained that in a constructivist curriculum teachers are responsible for providing learning opportunities to students that meet their interests, current knowledge, and needs (p. 17). I also discovered that the project-based approach that Ms. Baker occasionally employed was closely related to constructivism, where students observed and utilized resources to further explore a topic of their interest. Finally, I recommend the need for more research on constructivism in art education for the benefit of the field.

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## Appendix A

### “Letter of Consent to Principal”

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Principal,

As a graduate student at Buffalo State College, I am conducting a research project that looks at effective teaching strategies utilized in an early childhood art classroom. I have had the opportunity to discuss the procedures of the research project with your art teacher who has agreed to allow me to observe her teaching. I hope to receive your consent to these terms as well.

I will be collecting data for this study through observational field notes and semi-structured interviews with the art teacher using audio recordings of sessions, I will also rely on informal conversations and questionnaires to gather information. In addition, I will ask permission to take photographs of the classroom environment, teacher work samples, and unidentifiable student artwork along with photocopying other documents such as lesson plans.

Your school’s participation is voluntary and will be extremely beneficial to my research project. There are minimal risks entailed in this study. All the information collected will be confidential and used solely for research purposes. Pseudonyms will also be used to ensure the anonymity of participants’ identities and the school’s site.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of my request to be able to conduct my research at your school.

Please sign below if you are willing for me to pursue this project in your school. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (607) 341-0728 or email me at [schradm01@mail.buffalostate.edu](mailto:schradm01@mail.buffalostate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carly Schrader

---

- \_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for you to conduct this research study with our students.
- OR-
- \_\_\_\_\_ **I DO NOT** give permission for you to conduct this research study.

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*If you are unable to reach a member of the research team and have general questions, or have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Gina Game, IRB Administrator, SUNY Research Foundation/Buffalo State at (716) 878-6700 or [gameg@rf.buffalostate.edu](mailto:gameg@rf.buffalostate.edu).

## Appendix B

### “Letter of Consent to Teacher”

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Teacher,

As a graduate student at Buffalo State College, I am conducting a research project that looks at effective teaching strategies utilized in an early childhood art classroom. This study investigates the strategies and content utilized by teachers when implementing their style of curriculum.

I will be collecting data for this study through observational field notes and semi-structured interviews using audio recordings of sessions, I will also rely on informal conversations and questionnaires to gather information. With your permission, I will take photographs of the classroom environment, teacher work samples, and unidentifiable student artwork along with photocopying other documents such as lesson plans.

Your participation is voluntary and will be extremely beneficial to my research project. There are minimal risks entailed in this study. Furthermore, all the information gathered will be confidential and used solely for research purposes. Pseudonyms will also be used to ensure the anonymity of participants’ identities and the schools site.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of my request to be able to conduct my research in your classroom. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (607) 341-0728 or email me at [schradcm01@mail.buffalostate.edu](mailto:schradcm01@mail.buffalostate.edu).

Please complete the bottom of this form. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Carly Schrader

- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in the study described above.
  - OR-
  - \_\_\_\_\_ **I DO NOT** agree to participate in the study described above.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*If you are unable to reach a member of the research team and have general questions, or have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Gina Game, IRB Administrator, SUNY Research Foundation/Buffalo State at (716) 878-6700 or [ggameg@rf.buffalostate.edu](mailto:ggameg@rf.buffalostate.edu).

## **Appendix C**

### **“Semistructured Interview Questions”**

1. Why did you become a teacher, and why art specifically?
2. How long have you been a teacher?
3. What are your future goals as a teacher?
4. Describe your philosophy regarding discipline
5. How do you go about planning your curriculum?
6. How do you decide on the sequencing of lessons for your curriculum?
7. What types of resources do you use?
8. How do you decide on the content? Do big ideas, issues, media, materials, techniques, or formalism play on the selection of that particular content?
9. How do you plan for the variety of levels of student needs in your classes? In addition, what else plays a role in your construction of lessons?
10. How do you build off of and incorporate students' prior experiences?
11. How do you teach students life skills in the classroom? In other words, how do you incorporate skills that will benefit your students outside of the classroom and in the future?
12. What are your greatest strengths?
13. What are some things about your teaching you know you need to develop or work on?
14. What are a few effective teaching strategies that you use on a regular basis to reach your elementary learners?
15. Over the years, what has had the most impact on your teaching strategies and methods? What do you try to avoid?
16. What advice would you give to other early childhood art teachers just beginning in the field?
17. What advice would you give to other early childhood art teachers that have been teaching for several years?



## Appendix D

### “Ms. Baker’s Schedule”

Day/Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7:15-7:50	Set up	Set up	Set up	Set up	7:00-7:30 Breakfast with mentee; posting artwork
7:50-8:35	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Class A	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Class B	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Class C	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Class D	1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> Lesson planning; prep materials; ASW
8:35-9:20	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class A	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class B	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class C	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class D	1 <sup>st</sup> grade Assistant
9:20-10:05	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class A	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class B	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class C	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Class D	1 <sup>st</sup> grade Assistant
10:05-10:50	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Class A		2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Class B	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Class C	1 <sup>st</sup> - 5 <sup>th</sup> Lesson planning; prep materials ;ASW
10:50-11:35	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Class A	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Class B	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Class C	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Class D	1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> Lesson planning; prep materials; ASW
11:45-12:00	Travel	Travel	Travel	Travel	Travel
12:00-12:30	Lunch	Kindergarten Class B	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:35-1:05	Kindergarten Class A	Kindergarten Class C	K-planning	Kindergarten Class E	Kindergarten Tutor
1:10-1:40	Kindergarten Tutor	Lunch	Kindergarten Tutor	Kindergarten Class F	Kindergarten Tutor
1:45-2:15	Kindergarten Tutor	Kindergarten Class D	Kindergarten Tutor	Kindergarten Tutor	Kindergarten Class G
2:15-3:30	K-prep, set up; meetings; afternoon duty, 1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> planning; ASW	K-prep, set up; meetings; PLC; afternoon duty, 1 <sup>st</sup> - 5 <sup>th</sup> planning; ASW	K-prep, set up; meetings; afternoon duty; 1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> planning; ASW	K-prep, set up; meetings; afternoon duty; 1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> planning; ASW	K-prep, set up; afternoon duty; Website

## Appendix E

### “Kindergarten Unit 1: Mondrian’s Lines, Shapes and Colors”

Lesson	Grade: Kindergarten	Materials
<b>Activity</b>	Students will view and discuss a painting by Mondrian; learn a song to introduce line directions. Students will use glue sticks appropriately to glue straight strips of black construction paper to paper to create squares and rectangles. Students will paint one shape each of the primary colors. Students will learn the procedures for painting in the art room.	Art reproduction; 12"x 18" white construction paper, black construction paper cut into straight strips; glue sticks; red, blue, yellow paint, paintbrushes, paint cups
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Primary colors, red, blue, yellow, lines (horizontal, vertical, diagonal) shapes (square, rectangle, triangle)	Discussion, vocabulary cards

#### Assessment Plan

<p style="text-align: center;">Grade/ Subject: K/ Visual Arts Objectives</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>K.V.1 Use</b></p> <p><b>the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.</b> K.V.1.4 Understand characteristics of the Elements of Art, including <u>lines</u>, <u>shapes</u>, <u>colors</u>, and texture. K.V.3 <b>Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.</b> K.V.3.2 Use a variety of media to create art. K.V.3.3 Use the processes of <u>drawing</u>, painting, weaving, printing, collage, mixed media, sculpture, and ceramics to create art.</p> <p><b>K.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.</b> K.CX.2.2 Identify relationships between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as <u>math</u>, science, <u>language arts</u>, social studies, and <u>other arts</u> (music).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Curriculum Connection</p> <p><b>ELA KFS 1.</b> Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print. Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.</p> <p><b>Math KG</b> Identify and describe shapes (squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, hexagons, cubes, cones, cylinders, and spheres).</p> <p><b>Music KCR 1.2</b> Recognize the relationships between music and concepts from other areas.</p>		
Learning Target	Criteria for Success	Evidence
I can use art words to talk about art.	I will identify different kinds of lines, shapes and colors.	Observations and discussion
I can make art in different ways and with different materials.	I will use paper and paint to make art.	Artwork
I can use math, reading and music in art.	I will recognize shapes in art, use songs to remember information and recognize art words.	Observation and discussion

Essential Standards: V= Visual Literacy; CX= Contextual Relevancy; CR= Critical Response

## Appendix F

### “Kindergarten Student Artwork from Unit 1”



## Appendix G

### “Kindergarten Unit 2: Fall Color Centers”

Lesson	Grade-Kindergarten	Materials
<b>Teacher Actions</b>	Teacher will review concepts of lines, shapes and primary colors with students, then give directions for new centers; discuss learning targets. Teacher will observe and assist as needed during center activities; ask questions to elicit use of art vocabulary, identification of materials and processes and what students are discovering; assist with reading Learning Targets at each center.	White board, word cards
<b>Activity 1</b>	Painting Center: Students will use red and yellow paint to paint templates of fall leaves (and discover that mixing them makes orange). <i>Learning Target: I can paint with primary colors. (K.V.1.1)(K.V.1.3) (K.V.1.4 ) (K.V.3.1)(K.V.3.2) (K.V.3.3)</i>	Templates, red and yellow paint, Q-tips
<b>Activity 2</b>	Printmaking Center 1: Students will draw tree trunks and branches using the capital letter Y; then use leaf stamps to stamp yellow, red and orange leaves on the tree. <i>Learning Target: I can draw with the capital letter Y. I can print with stampers. (K.V.1.1) (K.V.1.3) (K.V.3.1) (K.V.3.2)(K.V.3.3)</i>	Light blue paper 6"x9", stampers, ink pads, brown crayon
<b>Activity 3</b>	Printmaking Center 2: Students will create leaf rubbings. <i>Learning Target: I can make prints with rubbing plates. (K.V.1.1) (K.V.3.1) (K.V.3.2) ( K.V.3.3)</i>	Leaf rubbing plates, crayons, paper
<b>Activity 4</b>	Drawing Center: Students will draw squares, rectangles and triangles with color pencils. <i>Learning Target: I can draw horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines to make shapes. (K.V.1.1) (K.V.1.4) (K.V.2.3) (K.V.3.3) (K.CX.2.2)</i>	Paper, color pencils
<b>Activity 5</b>	Puzzle Center: Students will choose and assemble puzzles of items that are primary colors. <i>Learning Targets: I can name the primary colors. (K.V.1.4)</i>	Jigsaw puzzles
<b>Activity 6</b>	Book Center: Student can look at and read books related to art. <i>Learning Target: I can learn about art from books. (K.CX.2.2)</i>	Books
<b>Activity 7</b>	Collage Center: Students will glue squares, rectangles and triangles to make pictures. <i>Learning Target: I can make a collage with squares, rectangles and triangles. (K.V.1.1) (K.V.1.4) (K.V.2.3) (K.V.3.1) (K.V.3.2) (K.V.3.3) (K.CX.2.2)</i>	Shapes cut outs from construction paper, glue sticks, crayons, paper

<b>Vocabulary</b>	Primary colors, red, blue, yellow, lines (horizontal, vertical, diagonal) shapes (square, rectangle, triangle) Secondary colors, orange	Discussion, white board, vocabulary cards, walls, learning targets on tables
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### Standards

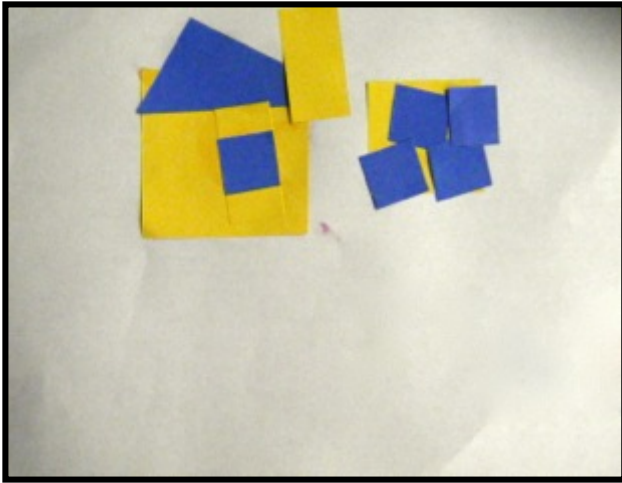
Grade/ Subject: /Visual Arts Objectives		<b>K.V.1 Use</b>
<b>the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.</b> K.V.1.1 Identify various art materials and tools. K.V.1.3 Recognize various symbols and themes in daily life. K.V.1.4 Understand characteristics of the Elements of Art, including lines, shapes, colors, and texture.		<b>K.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking</b>
<b>skills to artistic expression.</b> K.V.2.3 Create original art that does not rely on copying or tracing.		<b>K.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media,</b>
<b>and processes, safely and appropriately.</b> K.V.3.1 Use a variety of tools safely and appropriately to create art. K.V.3.2 Use a variety of media to create art.		
K.V.3.3 Use the processes of <u>drawing</u> , <u>painting</u> , <u>weaving</u> , <u>printing</u> , <u>collage</u> , mixed media, sculpture, and ceramics to create art.		
<b>K.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.</b> K.CX.2.2 Identify relationships between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as <u>math</u> , science, <u>language arts</u> , social studies, and <u>other arts</u> .		<b>K.CR.1 Use critical analysis to</b>
<b>generate responses to a variety of prompts.</b> K.CR.1.2 Explain personal art in terms of media and process.		
Curriculum Connection		
<b>Math Geometry:</b> Identify and describe shapes (squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, hexagons, cubes, cones, cylinders, and spheres). Analyze, compare, create, and compose shapes.		
<b>ELA Foundational Skills: 3c.</b> Read common high-frequency words by sight. (in Learning Target sentences on each table).		
<b>Speaking and Listening: 1a.</b> Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion). <b>b.</b> Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges. <b>3.</b> Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood. <b>6.</b> Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.		

Essential Standards: V= Visual Literacy; CX= Contextual Relevancy; CR= Critical Response

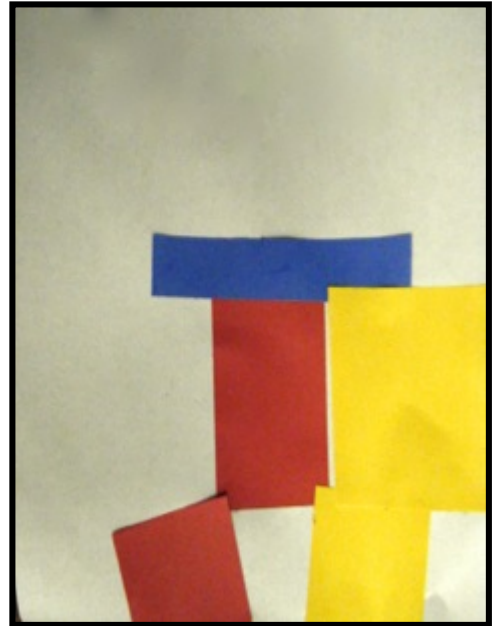
## Appendix H

### “Kindergarten Student Artwork from Unit 2”

**Patrice’s Artwork**



**David’s Artwork**



**Riley’s Artwork**



**Christopher’s Artwork**



## Appendix I

### “1<sup>st</sup> Grade: Landscapes Unit”

Lesson 2	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	Materials
<b>Activity</b>	Students will listen to a story about the life of Grandma Moses and learn about what makes a landscape. Students will color a background with a horizon line, a river, and a road; then choose images of different sizes to color, cut out and glue to the background to create a rural landscape. Students will explore landscapes through the NGA ArtZone Places website.	Book ( <i>Grandma Moses</i> : Interest Age Range: K - Grade 2, 5-7 yrs, <b>Guided Reading Level:</b> N), paper, crayons, color pencils, scissors, glue sticks, house and barn cutouts. Website: <a href="http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/education/kids/kids-facesplaces.html">http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/education/kids/kids-facesplaces.html</a>
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Lines, 2-D shapes, 3-D shapes, space, rural, landscapes, horizon line, size, setting	Discussion, teacher instruction, white board

#### Assessment Plan

Grade/Subject: 1st/Visual Arts Objectives

**1.V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.** 1.V.1.1 Identify tools, media and processes. 1.V.1.4 Understand characteristics of the Elements of Art, including lines, shapes, colors, textures, form, and space.  
**1.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.** 1.V.2.2 Understand how physical location affects what is seen in the immediate environment.  
**1.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.** 1.V.3.1 Use a variety of tools safely and appropriately to create art. 1.V.3.2 Execute control of a variety of media. 1.V.3.3 Use the processes of drawing, painting, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, and ceramics to create art.  
**1.CX.1 Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.** 1.CX.1.3 Classify art into categories, such as landscapes, cityscapes, seascapes, portraits, and still life.  
**1.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.** 1.CX.2.2 Identify connections between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies and other arts.

#### Curriculum Connection

**ELA RI 2.** Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text. 5. Know and use various text features (e.g., headings, tables of contents, glossaries, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts or information in a text. 6. Distinguish between information provided by pictures or other illustrations and information provided by the words in a text. 7. Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas.

Learning Target	Criteria for Success	Evidence
I can use art words to talk about art and artists. I can create art using different materials following the rules.	I will identify and use crayons, color pencils, scissors and glue sticks to draw, cut and glue. I will identify different kinds of lines and shapes; I will show how to make objects look closer and far away in my art.	Photos for Time-Lapse Artifact and discussion
I can understand why art is created.	I will correctly classify some art as a landscape.	Discussion
I can understand how art is connected to my life at school.	I will learn about an artist by listening to non-fiction reading.	Observation and discussion

Week 2 Reflections: This lesson has been extended for another week. Monday's class is behind because of starting block on a Wednesday, and then being out for Labor Day. To catch them up we will skip reading the book, and I will show a reproduction of Grandma Moses' landscape on the Smart Board and share facts about her life and work.

Week 3: Because of the amount of time it has taken students to color just the background, we did not add a road or river; added objects will be limited to houses, barns, trees.

Essential Standards: V= Visual Literacy; CX= Contextual Relevancy; CR= Critical Response



## Appendix J

### “1<sup>st</sup> Grade Student Artwork From Landscapes Unit”



## Appendix K

### “1<sup>st</sup> Grade: Seascapes Unit”

Lesson 4	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	Materials
<b>Activity</b>	1. Students will learn that artists sell their art to make money to buy goods and services. Students will view the seascapes of NC artist Jeff Pittman who sells art on his website. They will discuss all the things that might be seen at the beach. 2. They will paint a seascape by starting with the background (sky, water and beach) and then choose other objects to paint that might be seen in a seascape. 3. Students will write about how they created their seascape.	Smart Board, computer, website, tempera paint, 12"x18" paper, paint brushes, Q-tips, Styrofoam egg cartons
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Seascape, horizon line, space, lines (horizontal, vertical, diagonal, straight, curved, wavy) shapes (geometric and organic), colors (primary and secondary), economy	Discussions, teacher instruction, word wall, color wheel

#### Assessment Plan

Grade/ Subject: 1<sup>st</sup>/Visual Arts Objectives

**1.V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.** 1.V.1.4 Understand characteristics of the Elements of Art, including lines, shapes, colors, textures, form, and space.

**critical thinking skills to artistic expression.** 1.V.2.2 Understand how physical location affects what is seen in the immediate environment.

**1.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.** 1.V.3.1 Use a variety of tools safely and appropriately to create art. 1.V.3.2 Execute control of a variety of media. 1.V.3.3 Use the processes of drawing, painting, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, and ceramics to create art.

**1.CX.1**

**Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.** 1.CX.1.3 Classify art into categories, such as landscapes, cityscapes, seascapes, portraits, and still life. 1.CX.1.5 Understand that art is a reflection of the artist's ideas, environment, and/or resources.

**1.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.** 1.CX.2.2 Identify connections between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts.

**1.CR.1 Use critical analysis to generate responses to a variety of prompts.** 1.CR.1.2 Explain how and why personal works of art are made, focusing on media and process.

#### Curriculum Connection

**ELA SL.1.1** - Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups. **(1a)** Follow agreed upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion). **(1b)** Build on others talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges. **(1c)** Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion.

**W1.3** Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

**Social Studies 1.E.1.1** Summarize the various ways in which people earn and use money for goods and services.

21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

Financial Literacy: Students will learn one way in which artists make money in today's economy. They will gain an understanding that people support the work of artists whose art they like when they buy it.

Life and Career Skills: Students will be able to practice managing their time to complete the tasks necessary in creating their artwork.

Learning and Innovations Skills: Students will have the chance to make choices in the images they include in their art, to solve problems that come up as they paint, and communicate with the teacher and classmates about their artwork.

Learning Target	Criteria for Success	Evidence
I can use art words to talk about art.	I will write about how I created my painting of a seascape.	Writing in the Content Area
I can understand why art is created.	I will identify some art as a seascape.	Observation
I can understand how artists make money.	I will view art by an artist who sells his work on the internet.	Observation
I can create art using different materials safely, and appropriately.	I will create a seascape by painting with tempera paint.	Artwork

Essential Standards: V= Visual Literacy; CX= Contextual Relevancy; CR= Critical Response

## Appendix L

### “1<sup>st</sup> Grade Student Artwork From Seascapes Unit”

Jonathan’s Artwork



Andrew’s Artwork



Kevin’s Artwork



Jayla's Artwork



Jake's Artwork



Emily's Artwork



## Appendix M

### “2<sup>nd</sup> Grade: Caldecott Watercolor Unit”

Lesson 4	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	Materials
<b>Activity</b>	Students will view illustrations by Caldecott winners who used watercolors. 1: Students will continue practice with watercolors by painting a swan template for display at the Shrek play. 2: Students will draw, and then paint their own fairy tale watercolor artwork. 3. Students will classify media, tools and methods. 4. Students will write one thing they like about their artwork and one thing they wish they could do over.	Books ( <i>The Ugly Duckling</i> by Jerry Pinckney and other Caldecott winners and honor books where watercolor was the primary medium); watercolors; brushes; water containers; paper towels,
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Medium, tools, method, watercolor paint, paintbrush, water, palette,	Discussion, vocabulary cards, white board

#### Assessment Plan

Grade/ Subject: /Visual Arts Objectives	<b>2.V.1 Use</b>
<p><b>the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.</b> 2.V.1.1 Use appropriate art vocabulary when discussing media, processes, or images in art.</p> <p><b>2.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.</b> 2.V.2.3 Create art from real and imaginary sources of inspiration. <b>2.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.</b> 2.V.3.1 Use a variety of tools safely and appropriately to create art. 2.V.3.2 Recognize characteristics of a variety of media. 2.V.3.3 Use the processes of <u>drawing</u>, <u>painting</u>, weaving, printing, stitchery, collage, mixed media, sculpture, and ceramics to create art.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2.CX.2 Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.</b> 2.CX.2.2 Understand relationships between art and concepts from other disciplines, such as math, science, language arts, social studies, and other arts.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2.CR.1 Use critical analysis to generate responses to a variety of prompts.</b> 2.CR.1.2 Evaluate personal work, while in progress and at completion.</p>	
Curriculum Connection	
<p><b>ELA</b></p> <p><b>RS 7.</b> Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.</p> <p><b>RI 4.</b> Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a <i>grade 2 topic or subject area</i>.</p> <p><b>SL.2.6</b> Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.</p>	
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skills- Life and Career Skills	
<p><b>Self-Direction:</b> By writing an evaluation of their work students will be developing the ability to monitor their learning needs.</p>	

<b>Learning Target</b>	<b>Criteria for Success</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
I can use art words to talk about art with others.	I will classify the media, tools and methods using the vocabulary words on the white board.	Observation
I can use my thinking skills to make art.	I will create art using my imagination.	Artwork
I can use different materials and different methods to make art.	I will create art by drawing with a pencil. I will create art by painting with watercolors.	Artwork
I can understand how art is connected to my life at school.	I will use the illustrations in books to learn how artists use watercolors.	Observation
I can answer questions about my art.	I will write a sentence telling one thing I like best about my artwork. I will write a sentence telling one thing I would like to do over.	Writing

Essential Standards: V= Visual Literacy; CX= Contextual Relevancy; CR= Critical Response



## Appendix N

### “2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Student Artwork from Caldecott Watercolor Unit: Part I”

Erin’s Artwork



Jose’s Artwork





## Kara's Artwork

Day One



Day Two



## Chelsea's Artwork

Day One



Day Two



## Appendix O

### “2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Student Artwork from Caldecott Watercolor Unit: Part II”

Nick’s Artwork



Zoe’s Artwork



Sonny’s Artwork



Laura’s Artwork



Phoenix’s Artwork



Jacob's Artwork



## **Appendix P**

### **Executive Summary: Implementation of Constructivist Teaching Practices in a Kindergarten Through 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Art Classroom**

**Background:** During my first placement in student teaching, I observed and was pressured into teaching a formalist curriculum developed for Pre-K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade where students generated “cookie-cutter” art. Through this experience, I discovered how discouraging this type of curriculum could be. Several months after this, I was briefly introduced to the educational philosophy of constructivism. I questioned what aspects of constructivism could be found in a K-2 art classroom. I decided to examine a kindergarten, first, and second grade class of an elementary art teacher who claimed to employ constructivist aspects when she could. Through data collection and analysis I investigated K-2 students verbal and visual responses to the implementation of constructivist aspects or perhaps the lack thereof.

#### **Research Questions**

- What aspects of constructivism can be found in a K-2 art classroom?
  - What methods are employed to foster a constructivist K-2 art classroom?
  - How do students respond to the implementation of constructivist aspects in a K-2 art classroom or lack thereof?
  - What challenges arise in implementing aspects of constructivism in a K-2 art classroom?
  - What can I and other teachers learn about teaching art using a constructivist approach by studying a K-2 art classroom?

#### **Approach and Methods**

**Observer Participant Research Model:** For this study I followed the role of observer as participant in an elementary art teacher’s K-2 classes. My primary focus was observing and occasionally participating in classroom activities. Observational field notes, documents, and recorded interviews were examined simultaneously and logged in a researcher binder.

## **Data Collection Methods**

**Observational Field Notes:** Over a period of eight to ten weeks I observed the classroom instruction of the teacher participant and recorded, as well as reflected on what I saw and heard.

**Interviews:** I conducted informal and semistructured interviews with the teacher participant in school.

**Document Analysis:** I collected teacher lessons and took photographs of student's artwork to further study student's responses to aspects of constructivism or lack thereof.

## **Important Findings**

**Challenges in Implementing Aspects of Constructivism:** Time and scheduling constraints, teaching multiple grade levels in one classroom, the state standards, and the lack of a budget, were just some of the challenges the teacher participant confronted on a daily basis. These obstacles made it difficult for the teacher participant to incorporate as many constructivist aspects as she would have liked to in her K-2 art classes.

**Empowering Students: Teacher Expectations and Student Responses:** The teacher participant used three different methods to help K-2 students develop a sense of empowerment in the art classroom. She provided students with: knowledge of how to use artistic tools and mediums; flexible guidelines to create their artwork by; and artistic freedom and choice in their artwork. Students responded by displaying confidence in their artistic ability and when making their own decisions in their artwork. Students also displayed a sense of pride when they told stories through their artwork. Once students had developed a sense of empowerment, they gradually became autonomous learners in the art classroom.

**Teacher Limitations and Student Responses:** In a few K-2 units, the teacher participant presented students with limitations in their artwork. In response to these limitations, students did not: enthusiastically discuss their artwork; find their artwork to be personally relevant; take ownership over the imagery in their artwork; take pride in their artwork; enjoy creating their artwork. This demonstrated the importance behind providing students with artistic freedom and choice in their artwork.



## Appendix Q

### “Visual Abstract”

#### **Problem Statement**

Even though many teachers support the use of constructivist practices in a classroom, it is unknown how teachers employ constructivist practices efficiently in a K-2 art classroom.

#### **Research Questions**

- What aspects of constructivism can be found in a K-2 art classroom?
- What methods are employed to foster a constructivist K-2 art classroom?
- How do students respond to the implementation of constructivist aspects in a K-2 art classroom?
- What challenges arise in implementing aspects of constructivism in a K-2 art classroom?
- What can I and other teachers learn about teaching art using a constructivist approach by studying a K-2 art classroom?



#### **Review of Literature**

What is Constructivism?  
Early Childhood Development  
Artistic Development  
Implementation of Constructivist Practices  
Meaningful Artwork and Constructivism  
Reggio Emilia



#### **Data Collection Methods**

- △ Observational Field Notes
- △ Document Analysis
- △ Semistructured Interviews



#### **Important Findings**

- Challenges in Implementing Aspects of Constructivism
- Empowering Students: Teacher Expectations and Student Responses
- Teacher Limitations and Student Responses
- The Balance Between Structure and Artistic Freedom
- Students Playing an Active Role in Their Learning Process, Results in Meaningful Learning Experiences
- Scheduling and Adequate Time in the Art Classroom
- Art is an Academic Area